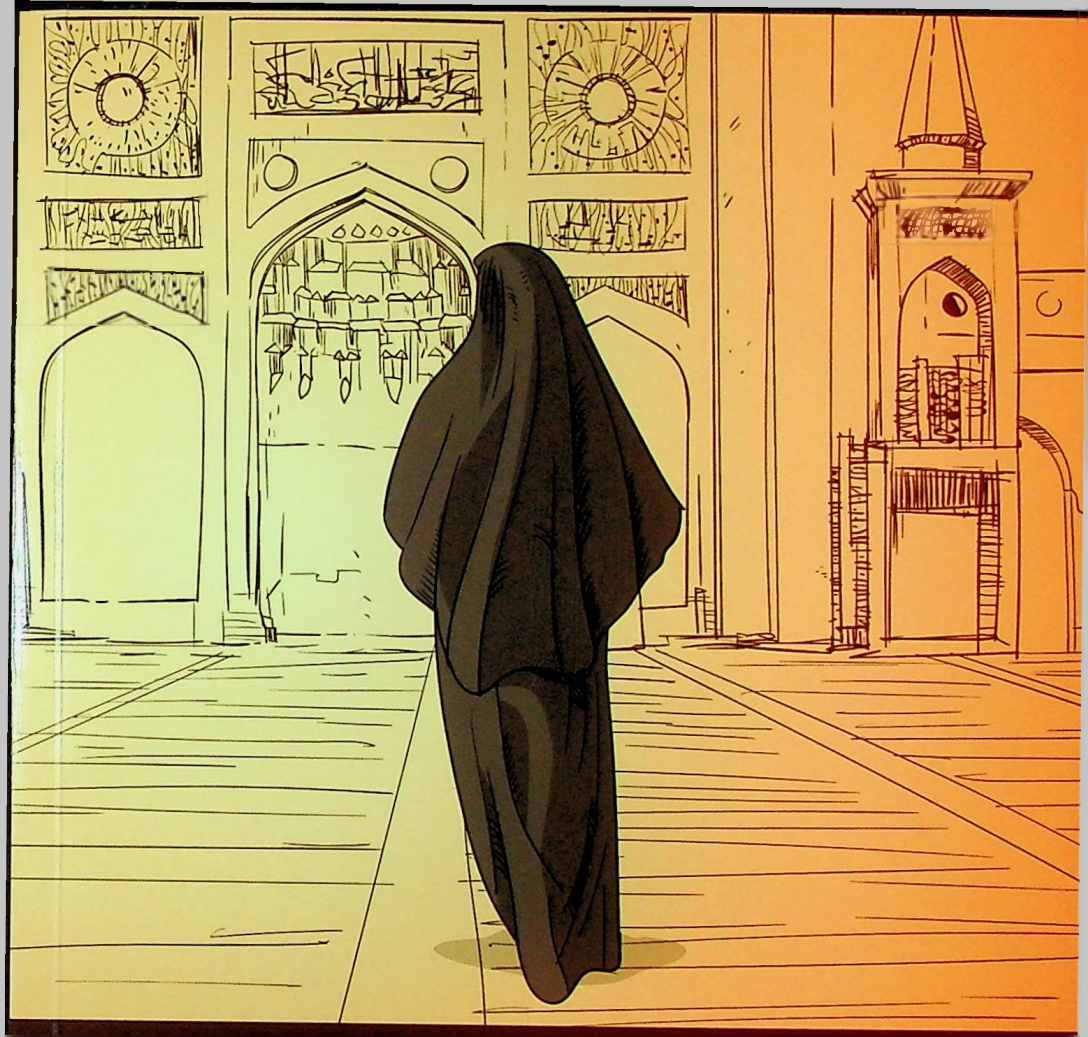

THE CHARACTER OF THE MUSLIM WOMAN

Women's Emancipation during the Prophet's Lifetime

Abd al-Halim Abu Shuqqah

Translated by Adil Salahi

The Prophet ﷺ established complete equality between men and women as he said, "Women are full sisters of men". Yet both have their respective special functions. This volume draws out the features of the Muslim woman's character as outlined in the Qur'an and Sunnah. It shows that much of what we imagine to be Islamic rulings are no more than social traditions.

This Eight volume series is the author's abridged version of his longer work with the same Arabic title, *Tahrir al-Mar'ah fi 'Asr al-Risalah* spanning a twenty-five year study comprising fourteen great anthologies of ahadith, but in this book he only rarely includes hadiths from any anthology other than the two most authentic ones of al-Bukhari and Muslim.

Abd al-Haleem Abu Shuqqah (d.1995) was a great teacher and scholar. He had a real passion to revive the true Islamic spirit in the *ummah* and dedicated his life to learning and teaching. He taught in Egypt, Syria, Qatar and Kuwait. His particular focus was on Hadith studies.

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WOMEN'S EMANCIPATION DURING THE PROPHET'S LIFETIME

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Volume I

Abd al-Halim Abu Shuqqah

Translated and Edited by
Adil Salahi

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Acknowledgement

Ever since I began working on this book, I have tried to show completed parts to a number of scholars who are my friends, in order to benefit from their valuable knowledge. Their comments have indeed helped me to revise and improve upon what I have written. To all of them I am indebted. However, foremost among these is Dr Yussuf al-Qaradawi, who read the whole book, chapter by chapter, upon the completion of each. I am greatly indebted to him for his highly useful comments. Moreover, he has honoured me with writing a foreword in which he briefly refers to the many difficulties encountered by Muslim women in modern times. I sincerely hope that I live up to his expectations.

Other friends and scholars who read some chapters of the book are numerous, and they belong to several Arab countries. The one who deserves special mention is my learned teacher, Shaykh Muhammad al-Ghazali, who read a large part of this study and who also honoured me with writing a foreword to the work.

My full partner in completing this work is my life partner and beloved wife, Malakah Zain al-Deen. Her contribution was by no means

limited to ensuring that I enjoyed the right atmosphere for research and writing. She often overcame her natural instinct to stay at home with our children in order to accompany me on long journeys so that I could be free to write without being interrupted. She also helped greatly by putting together the different versions related by al-Bukhari of the same Hadith and in looking up unfamiliar terms in dictionaries. She also copied out draft after draft, and added the details of numerous footnotes. Furthermore, she was always ready with a useful point of view during the many discussions we had on many aspects of the study. May God bless her with continued health and reward her richly for her dedicated efforts.

Transliteration Table

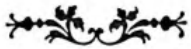
Consonants. Arabic

initial, unexpressed, medial and final: ء ʾ

ا	a	د	d	ض	ḍ	ك	k
ب	b	ذ	dh	ط	ṭ	ل	l
ت	t	ر	r	ظ	ẓ	م	m
ث	th	ز	z	ع	ʿ	ن	n
ج	j	س	s	غ	gh	هـ	h
ح	ḥ	ش	sh	ف	f	و	w
خ	kh	ص	ṣ	ق	q	ي	y

Vowels, diphthongs, etc.

short:	ـَ	a	ـِ	i	ـُ	u	
long:	ـَا	ā	ـُو	ū	ـِي	ī	
diphthongs:	ـَوْ	aw					
	ـَيْ	ay					



Translator's Notes

I have long believed that unless the Muslim woman rediscovers and plays the role Islam gives her, as an equal and full partner of man, the long-awaited new phase of Islamic civilisation will remain distant. Yet traditions that have acquired a semi-religious status constitute a huge impediment in the way of attaining such an aspiration. This book makes great efforts to present to Muslims—women and men, and to the world at large, the true status Islam gives to women. Hence, it is not surprising that two of the best scholars of our time, Shaykh Muhammad al-Ghazali and Shaykh Yusuf al-Qaradawi, have unreservedly welcomed it and praised its author.

I need not add to these eminent scholars' praise of this work. I wish only to say that I read the first volume of the full-length edition in 1994. I then visited the author, the late Abd al-Haleem Abu Shuqqah, whom I had met only recently. As we discussed the book, I suggested to him that it should be made available to all Muslim communities in their own languages, and further that it should be made available in English. His response was very encouraging. All praise is due to God that we are now able to fulfil this task, and we have chosen to translate the abridged edition, which the author himself prepared.

The Author

Abd al-Haleem Abu Shuqqah was born in Cairo in August 1924. His family was religious and his home was close to a small mosque affiliated to an Islamic society which concentrated on education and the promotion of Islamic values and manners. At the mosque, he received his early Islamic education. After completing high school, he studied at the University of Cairo and graduated with a BA in History.

At university, he developed a close friendship with two students from Syria. One of these was Abd al-Rahman al-Bani, who later became a leading specialist in education and an Islamic scholar. The two men soon established a more permanent relationship when al-Bani married Abu Shuqqah's sister. The other fellow student was, Umar Baha' al-Amiri who belonged to the Muslim Brotherhood and was a fine poet with a clear Islamic dimension to his poetry. He later held the post of Syrian Ambassador in several countries. This friendship markedly influenced Abu Shuqqah as he felt the need to revive Islamic values among the populations of Muslim countries, particularly those that had recently regained their independence.

After graduation, Abu Shuqqah worked as a teacher in Egypt. During this period he met many eminent, scholars including Shaykh Muhammad al-Khadir al-Husayn, a Tunisian scholar who became the Rector of al-Azhar, the world's oldest Islamic university. Abu Shuqqah attended Shaykh al-Husayn's circle which discussed various religious and educational subjects. He also met Ahmad Shakir, a judge, writer and poet who stressed the importance of language and education in national advancement. Another influence was Muhiy al-Din al-Khateeb, the Editor of *al-Fatḥ*, a political, nationalist and religious magazine. He also joined the Muslim Brotherhood and held several discussions with its founder, Hasan al-Banna, in which he stressed the importance of giving more attention to education. Each of these contacts formed links in a chain that influenced Abu Shuqqah's thought and development.

The author was imprisoned twice during Nasser's dictatorship which was extremely hostile to any Islamic revival. The first time was in 1953, when he was teaching at a girls' high school. He remained in prison for a few months, thereafter leaving Egypt because the tension between the government and the Muslim Brotherhood continued to increase. His second arrest occurred during the school summer holidays of 1965. At the time, he was working in Qatar, and the Qatari government exercised strong pressure, requesting the Egyptian government to release him and other Egyptian detainees who worked in Qatar. Nonetheless, his imprisonment lasted several months.

After leaving Egypt in 1954, Abu Shuqqah lived in Jordan for a while, then in Syria before moving to Qatar where he worked as a teacher. He stayed in Qatar over the period 1956-1967 then moved to Kuwait where he resided another twelve years, 1967-1978. During this time, he often visited Syria during the summer holidays to see his sister and to pursue his Hadith Studies, particularly under Shaykh Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī. In 1978, he returned to Egypt where he lived until he passed away in 1995.

The idea

His two interests—education and Hadith Study—gave him the idea of writing a new biography of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) based on the authentic Sunnah. He felt that the existing biographies did not rely on very authentic sources, and further that the Hadith sources would give a better and more correct version. He also considered this would highlight the educational dimension in Prophet Muhammad's (peace be upon him) life.

He, therefore, started a thorough study of the main Hadith anthologies, but was surprised at the large number of Hadiths which speak of practical cases and situations that described the social conditions and the pattern of life during the Prophet's lifetime. He felt that interaction between men and women during the time of the Prophet

and his companions was widely different from that of contemporary religious communities in Muslim countries. This modern approach was upheld by most scholars and by the different Islamic organizations, such as the Muslim Brotherhood, *al-Jam'iyyah al-Shar'iyyah*, as well as the Salafi and Sufi trends.

Many scholars have pointed out that Islam brought about a fundamental change in the status of women in Arabia and in the world at large. Several studies identify that Islam gave women their independent status as well as equality with men. However, very little had been written on how this was implemented in real life. His review of the Hadith anthologies gave Abu Shuqqah the idea that a thorough study of the transformation the Prophet brought about in the status of women and in male-female relationships was needed and so he decided to undertake this task. Essentially, he hoped to highlight the role, status and activity of Muslim women during the Prophet's lifetime and how women's emancipation was duly fulfilled.

Abu Shuqqah started by reading the major Hadith anthologies, beginning with an in-depth study of the two *Ṣaḥīḥ* of al-Bukhari and Muslim. He then studied the four *Sunan* anthologies of Abu Dāwūd, al-Tirmidhī, al-Nasā'ī and Ibn Mājah. He then added *al-Muwaṭṭa'* by Imam Mālik, the *Ṣaḥīḥ* by Ibn Ḥibbān and *al-Musnad* by Imam Ahmad. He followed these by studying al-Ṭabarānī's three *Mu'jams*, then the two *al-Musnad* by al-Bazzār and Abu Ya'lā. He finished with studying al-Haythamī's *Majma' al-Zawā'id wa Manba' al-Fawā'id*. His was a careful and methodical study, one that selected everything that was relevant to women in any aspect.

Abu Shuqqah coupled this review of the Hadiths with a thorough study of the Qur'an and its verses that have particular relevance to women. While the Qur'anic address is general and applies to both men and women, it also pays particular attention to woman and establishes her rights, particularly in relation to her status in both

the family and in society. The Prophet's Hadiths provide practical examples of how these Qur'anic principles are put into effect by Muslims.

He then embarked on writing his findings, all the while consulting other scholars, most notably Shaykh Muhammad al-Ghazali, Shaykh Yusuf al-Qaradawi and Dr Muhammad al-Mahdi al-Badri. He revised his writings, making additions and deletions several times. He also often went into retreat to write and address the comments given to him by scholars whom he consulted on particular aspects of his research. The list of scholars whom he consulted is quite long and emanated from many different countries.

The author mentions that his full partner in producing this work was his wife, Malakah Zain al-Din. She not only provided the necessary comforts at home that a scholar needs, but also helped in many other ways. For example, al-Bukhari might have entered a Hadith several times in his anthology because of its relevance to different subjects. With each such occurrence, al-Bukhari gave a different version, either in the chain of transmission or in the actual text to highlight a particular aspect. Malakah Zain al-Din extricated all the versions of such Hadiths so that they would be available to the author at a glance. She further researched the meaning of unfamiliar words, and words that had gone out of use. She also wrote clean copies of earlier drafts once these were thoroughly revised.

This endeavour took more than twenty years of his life. Abu Shuqqah was active in other areas, but his main interest was the development of a progressive Islamic vision through better study and understanding of the Prophet's guidance. In the late 1940s, he collaborated with some friends in establishing what was called the 'Committee of Muslim Youths Library' which was devoted to the publication of books and pamphlets stressing the primary importance of Islamic education and proper understanding of Islamic teachings, as well as

the nature of Islamic society. This library was closed down in 1954 and all its contents were confiscated by the Egyptian government as part of its clampdown on the Islamic revivalist movement.

The persecution of the Islamic movement in Egypt and several other Muslim countries led to the start of *al-Muslim al-Mu'āṣir*, *The Contemporary Muslim*, an intellectual magazine that advocated a new Islamic outlook for the advancement of the cultural and social standards of Muslims. Abu Shuqqah was the prime mover of this magazine which published essays and papers by a large number of scholars and intellectuals from many Muslim countries.

Abu Shuqqah visited many Muslim countries as well as several European countries and the United States, and participated in numerous conferences.

The work

Abu Shuqqah produced his original work in 1993 in six large volumes comprising 1,800 pages and then he produced an abridged version in eight volumes comprising 1,250 pages of a smaller size. He completed six of these volumes before he passed away, with the last two being prepared by his lifelong friend Dr Muhammad al-Mahdi al-Badri. When we refer to 'the book' we are speaking of the full work, either the six volumes of the original version or the eight of the abridged series. The two forewords by Shaykh al-Ghazali and Shaykh al-Qaradawi were published in the original book. In this version, we have the full text of Shaykh al-Ghazali's foreword, but the one by al-Qaradawi is an abridged text.

What makes this book unique is that it relies only on the Qur'an and the most authentic Hadiths of the Prophet (peace be upon him). The author has put together a unique treasury of the most reliable and authentic statements relevant to the position of women in Muslim society. In addition, he classified these so as to cover all aspects of

human life and across all levels of civilisation. Thus, he highlights the relevance of the religious text to life's practical affairs.

By necessity, the author felt he must cite certain Hadiths on several occasions. This is because when he deals with a general subject, such as women's participation in social activities he looks at all areas of social life. Hence, the Hadith in question may be relevant to different aspects, and the author cites it under each topic. Some Hadiths, particularly longer ones, may be relevant to different areas, and need to be quoted under each heading. At times, however, the author may quote only a part of the Hadith at each occasion, so as to highlight its relevance to the subject under discussion. In so doing, he demonstrates a profound insight of Islamic scholarship and particularly how to understand religious texts.

There are numerous references to Ibn Ḥajar and his comments on hadiths. This is only to be expected in such a book, because Ibn Ḥajar wrote *Fatḥ al-Bārī*, the best-known commentary on al-Bukhari's *Ṣaḥīḥ* anthology of authentic Hadiths. It runs to fourteen large volumes. The author's quotations are always short and to the point.

There are numerous references to the chapter headings in al-Bukhari's *Ṣaḥīḥ*. This is because al-Bukhari was very careful in his selection of such headings, and scholars say that al-Bukhari's Fiqh insight is reflected in these.

The author's method is to provide the texts under subheadings. In the process of translation, I often felt that some background or further information was necessary. I have added many footnotes. Since the author did not include many footnotes, I noted these by adding the phrase 'Author's note'. However, too many footnotes may be tiresome to a large section of readers. Therefore, wherever I have felt it better or necessary to give some background, or highlight certain aspects, I have provided this within the text, keeping such input to a minimum.

The book received enthusiastic acclaim by many scholars across the Muslim world, but it was also severely criticised by the more conservative scholars. This is not surprising, because what people have learnt over a lifetime, supported by social tradition in conservative societies, is not easy to question, let alone declare as wrong. However, the word of truth has its own force, and when it is supported by the Qur'an and authentic Hadiths, it cannot be suppressed for long. The author anticipated such objections and he devoted two volumes of this abridged version to a 'debate' on the main issues of women's participation in social, professional and political life within society and on the type of attire and adornments a religious Muslim woman may wear in public. The debate cites all the evidence the 'objectors' provide and answers them in the light of the Qur'an and Hadith.

Although the book was written more than a quarter of a century ago, it is still very relevant because the gap between the type of society established by the Prophet, particularly in the area of male-female relationships, is very different from what many advocates of Islam still think. They need this book so as to review old established notions that affect them, their families and society.

London
March 2021

Adil Salahi

Foreword

Muhammad al-Ghazali

I would have loved for this book to have been published a few centuries ago such that it could have presented the situation of women in Muslim society using such a scholarly approach at that juncture. Instead, the problem is that in their treatment of women, Muslims have for long deviated from the teachings of their faith. Dark statements and fabricated hadiths that are falsely attributed to the Prophet have for long circulated among them. Even the best of these hadiths is questionable. Yet their circulation has managed to manoeuvre Muslim women into a position of total ignorance that is far removed from the concerns of both faith and the life of this world. Thus, educating women was deemed to be a sin, and they were banned from going to mosques! For women to be involved in the present or future affairs of the Muslim community was beyond the reach of Muslims' imagination! Indeed, it was common for Muslims to ridicule femininity. Furthermore, robbing women of their rights, whether material or social, has become perfectly acceptable.

Only three years ago, a famous orator said in an angry outpour: 'Blessed were the days when a woman went out only three times in her

life: (1) from her mother's belly into the world; (2) from her parents' home to her husband's, and (3) from her husband's home to the grave'. My caustic retort being: 'Certainly unblessed were those days, and I pray they will never be seen again by the Muslim community. Those were days of ignorance, not days of Islam. They upheld unjust traditions, and they were far removed from the straight path of Islam. The Muslim community's debacle into the third world, particularly in the fields of education, training and production, is largely due to such deviant traditions'.

Someone overheard my scathing comment. He said to me: 'Why do you object to such a sincere feeling expressed by a man who genuinely wants the best for his community? Are not his words supported by the hadith attributed to Fāṭimah, the Prophet's daughter, in which she said that it was best for a woman to see no one and to be seen by no one? When the Prophet heard her, he hugged her and said: "A daughter after my own heart." Does that not confirm that Islam prefers isolation for women, from birth to the grave?" I said to the man: "You are quoting a statement attributed to the Prophet, but no respectable anthology of hadiths mentions it. It is a statement that is contrary to what is clearly stated in the Qur'an, authentic hadiths and the conduct of the Prophet and his rightly guided successors.'

Fabricators have falsely attributed to the Prophet their own invented statements which impose illiteracy on women. Some of those in authority have fallen for their deception and have refused to open schools for girls. These same fabricators have also invented rulings and provisions prohibiting women from going to mosques. They have even sunk further in ignorance, limiting women's role to the satisfaction of physical desires only.

This book takes Muslims back to the way charted by the Prophet (peace be upon him), adding nothing and leaving nothing out. It is a book of documents, written by a scholar who is rich in knowledge,

keen to present his faith in its true colours. He is dedicated to the truth. He hates the sort of futile argument in which those confirmed in mediocrity excel. His method relies on presenting authentic statements as related in the two Hadith anthologies compiled by al-Bukhari and Muslim, which are universally accepted as the most authentic. He rarely delves into other anthologies. When you read his quotations and explanations you will appreciate the broad area Islam outlines for relations between men and women. You will also appreciate the highly honourable role women play in life. As he draws these correct lines, the author steers away from the traditions of the triumphant West so as to guide the Muslim community away from the pitfalls into which modern civilisation has slipped. This modern civilisation has, to a certain extent, affected us. We, however, want to avoid its pitfalls so that we can return, not to the sort of ignorance that caused our defeat, but instead to the traditions of our noble ancestors. These were the traditions that prevailed during the blessed lifetime of the Prophet and his rightly guided successors. Nothing that later generations have invented or ignorant people have advocated contrary to such noble traditions should even be looked at by any Muslim.

Foreword

Yusuf al-Qaradawi

By sheer numbers women constitute half the human race, but their impact on human society through their role in the family and the care they take of their husbands and children give them greater importance. Indeed, some wise people point to the role of women in the lives of men who attain positions of greatness. In some cultures, it is a common saying that: 'Behind every great man stands a great woman.' On the other hand, some philosophers put the blame on women for practically all calamities and crimes that take place in our world. Some go further than that, attributing to women all the misery suffered by the human race, ever since the beginning of life until the end of the world. They allege that it was Eve who persuaded Adam to eat from the forbidden tree, thus causing man's expulsion from heaven and the now miserable life we live on earth. This view is also confirmed by some statements in the Old Testament.

Islam gives women their rightful and honourable status as daughters, wives and mothers, as useful members of society and, above all, as human beings. From the Islamic point of view, the relationship

between man and woman is not one of hostility, nor indeed rivalry. Instead, it is a relationship of two mutually complementary parts of a single unit. The Qur'an says: 'Each of you is an issue of the other.' (3: 195) The Prophet also says: 'Women are full sisters of men'. It is unfortunate, however, that some of the darker views concerning women have found their way into the minds of some Muslims, leading them to formulate a negative concept of women and their role in society. As a result, they ill-treat their women. They, thus, transgress the limits set by God, wronging their women and wronging themselves in consequence. This was particularly true during the long period when the Muslim community went far away from the guidance provided by the Prophet and the middle way established by Islam. Theirs was a different course from that of the early Muslims, a community distinguished by fairness and ease.

The situation of women in our Muslim communities provides a clear example of leaning towards one of two extremes. Some take a negative attitude, looking at women with contempt. To these, a woman is Satan's tool that he manipulates to lead people astray. She is mentally and religiously deficient, and she is essentially incompetent. Some men look at women as slaves. When such a person marries, he views his wife as no more than an article he has bought with the dowry he pays. Therefore, he can divorce her whenever he wants, depriving her of any rights or compensation. Indeed, a person of this type may go as far as to describe his wife as a pair of shoes which he wears or takes off whenever he wants. By contrast, according to this view, if the woman dislikes her husband, she must endure her hardship until he agrees to divorce her. She cannot be freed of her bondage without his consent.

These people confine women to the home, allowing them to receive no education and preventing them from going out to work or contributing to any social activity. They even deny them the opportunity to go to mosques for worship or listening to a speech or sermon. Yet they

are fully aware that during the Prophet's lifetime, women regularly frequented the mosque, even for the two night prayers of Isha and Fajr. They also know that the Prophet emphatically said to men: 'Do not prevent women servants of God from attending God's places of worship'. (Related by Muslim) They often cite in support of their views some statements that are evidently ambiguous, overlooking those that are clearly definitive. They cite, for example, Qur'anic statements that are specifically addressed to the Prophet's wives only, such as: 'Wives of the Prophet! You are unlike any other women: if you truly fear God, do not speak too soft, lest any who is sick at heart should be moved with desire; but speak in an appropriate manner. And stay quietly in your homes'. (33: 32-33) and: 'When you ask the Prophet's wives for something, do so from behind a screen.' (33: 53)

Such people deny women the chance to choose their husbands, or even the right to accept or reject a marriage proposal. Some men even give their daughters away in marriage without their consent, and without consulting them. A short while ago I was reading al-Rāghib al-Aṣfahānī's book *Muḥāḍar't al-Udabā'*, or *Lectures by Men of Letters*. To my surprise, I found a chapter on daughters entitled, 'Advantages of a girl's death and wishing for it'. He starts this chapter by attributing two false statements to the Prophet: 'The grave is a good husband'. and: 'Burying girls is a good practice'. Both these statements are evidently fabricated and falsely attributed to God's Messenger.

People with this extreme view practically make women's life a prison into which no ray of light can penetrate. She cannot leave home or go to the mosque, and she cannot converse with men, even if the highest standards of decorum are observed. To them, her face and hands must be covered, and her voice and speech must not be heard.

Such is one extreme. There are, on the other hand, people who, in their view of women's status, go to the other extreme, transgressing

the limits set by God, human nature and universal virtue. The first group are blinded by inherited Eastern traditions while the blindness of the others is based on alien Western traditions. Some of this second group want to abolish all distinctions between men and women. Both are human beings, born to a couple of one man and one woman. As such, why should there be any difference between them? These people forget that in the very way they are created, and even in their physical constitutions, they are different. They also overlook the wisdom behind such differences, namely, that each has been given the qualities and abilities most suited to the roles they have to play in life. Motherhood, with all its aspects, virtues and troubles, is the most essential aspect of a woman's role. Hence, she stays at home more than the man. Since this is a distinction brought about by human nature, we must not ignore it when we make our plans for women's education and professional work. Indeed, most contemporary leading figures in social science and planning acknowledge such need.

It is true to say that much of the extremism of those who advocate the importation of Western traditions is a reaction to the extremism of those who hold tight to Eastern traditions. Extremism always produces an opposition. God wants us to be free of all bondage, eastern and western, old and modern. To do this, we must always lean towards the guidance outlined by Prophet Muhammad and the true faith he advocated.

This book I am introducing to readers demonstrates the well-balanced Islamic view of this highly important issue that has suffered much confusion over the years, namely: women and their role in the family, society and human life generally. Having consistently found many authentic and relevant texts to contradict much of Muslims' attitudes and practices, the author has given this subject much of his attention over many years. What he has noted is that Muslims are too restrictive in their attitude towards women. Furthermore, the deeper

he delved in his studying of Islam and its approach to this issue, the more convinced he became of its breadth and the great value it attaches to women's role in the life of the family and society. In this study, he does not rely on the views of any particular scholar or writer. He only lets Qur'anic and Hadith texts deliver the argument. Therefore, he deliberately cites a very large amount of texts, rightly believing that they are more emphatic in putting his point across to us. He quotes scholars and their commentaries on texts only when needed to explain a particular text or aspect, or to present differing ways of understanding.

What we have here, then, is a scholarly study corroborated by the most authentic texts, derived from the best sources. The author has put into it his best efforts, and we can only benefit from his broad, scholarly skills and expertise. The work reveals itself as encyclopaedic, covering all important areas concerning the Muslim woman: her character, position, clothing, appearance, make-up, meetings with men, family and social roles as well as her participation in the social and political life of her community. It relies only on Qur'anic and Hadith statements and how they were understood and implemented by scholars and the Muslim community during the very early generations of Islam.

Essentially, this book adopts a method that aims to remove arbitrary restrictions that have long been imposed on Muslim women. Indeed, for centuries the Muslim world has been drifting towards an increasingly restrictive and suspicious attitude towards women. Two main reasons have aggravated this increasingly restrictive position. The first is the widespread ignorance of texts that encourage an easy and liberal approach, rather than a strict one. This applies particularly to Hadith texts, since the Qur'anic texts are available and well known to all. It is the Hadith texts that have been overlooked even though they are documented in different anthologies. Scholars have often preferred to concentrate on studying their schools of thought in

preference to the study of Hadith. As a result, the majority of Muslims have remained unaware of a large number of authentic hadiths while they often quote ones that are terribly lacking in authenticity, or that have even been fabricated and falsely attributed to the Prophet.

The second reason contributing to this state of affairs is that texts that remained well known have often been misunderstood, or wrongly applied, or even arbitrarily twisted to support particular rulings. They are often taken out of context, or in isolation from the main rulings and objectives of Islamic law. They are rarely looked at in a way that seeks an overall understanding of the Islamic concept.

The author successfully identified both these reasons, and he concentrated his efforts in two main areas. In particular, he searched for definitive Hadith statements and cited large numbers of such texts that reflect the essence of Islamic values and concepts as they relate to women. These statements are both numerous and lucidly expressed. It is enough to look at the headings and subheadings under which the author lists Hadith statements to appreciate how wide and far reaching they are in import and in the field they cover. The author first wanted to include in his study as many Hadith anthologies as possible. They all include great treasures that should not be ignored. As a result of this painstaking effort over a very long period of time, he was able to come up with a very large number of texts. His long reflection, however, led him to conclude that what he should put before us should be, at this stage at least, limited to texts related in the two anthologies of al-Bukhari and Muslim. These are universally accepted as the most authentic of Hadith anthologies. What he puts before us, then, is a great treasure of the Prophet's sunnah, or tradition, in its three forms: verbal, practical and approved. He often cites texts without adding any comment or explanation, for they are mostly self-explanatory and clearly spell out what he wants to say.

However, when the author comments on texts, either to explain them or to deduce rulings, or to support a particular view, or to show how they apply to our modern life, his expert scholarship with its strong focus on the point at issue is revealed. For example, the author's comments at the end of the chapter he devotes to women's participation in social life should be carefully read and studied. He cites in this chapter a very large number of texts confirming such full participation. In his comments, he refers to modern aspects of social life that make such participation inevitable. His comments also reflect his full awareness of the conditions that prevail in modern society. May I say that a person who overlooks such modern trends that have affected our Muslim societies cannot arrive at correct rulings on issues relating to women, even though he may be well versed in texts, knowing them by heart. It is imperative that a scholar should take into account both duties and prevailing conditions, as Imam Ibn al-Qayyim explains.

The other important area with which the author is preoccupied is to show the mistaken approaches that have deliberately or unintentionally taken statements out of their proper contexts. He successfully puts them back into context and deduced the right rulings they make. Examples of these are: (1) the Qur'anic verse that says to the Prophet's wives: 'Stay quietly in your homes'. (33: 33), and (2) the hadith that mentions women as: 'deficient in mind and religion'. The author further discusses some very important issues of methodology which some scholars use in justifying their restrictive approach to women, and which contradict what the Prophet's tradition states. Examples of these are the special status of the Prophet's wives and their having to be addressed from behind a screen, and the issue of prohibiting what may lead to a forbidden practice.

This book is extremely rich in the authentic statements it quotes, the evidence it provides, the clear understanding it presents and the scholarly comments it makes. Hence, it represents an invaluable

addition to Islamic scholarship. Some of us may, under the influence of our environments and legacies, disagree with some details in the book. However, no one can deny that it clearly reflects the overall Islamic concept of women on the basis of definitive statements and documented practices during the Prophet's lifetime.

I pray that every reader will benefit by it and that God will richly reward its author for the painstaking efforts he exerted over many years. May He guide us all to persevere on His straight path.

Introduction

Some years back, I wanted to start an in-depth study of the Prophet's life, relying mainly on books of Hadith. My idea was to ensure maximum possible reliability and authenticity. It is a fact that reports mentioned in books of the Prophet's biography have not received the same scholarly attention as texts of hadith. Their chains of transmission have not been verified so as to sift authentic reports from less authentic ones. My motive at the time was that the Prophet's biography presents a large number of statements, actions and approvals attributed to the Prophet. As such, they come under the Sunnah and Muslims must consider these as part of the Prophet's guidance which they should follow. Hence, the history of the Prophet and his personal life must be presented to Muslims with the maximum degree of in-depth verification and authentication, so that they are certain of what to follow.

Perhaps I should mention here that this whole idea of studying the Prophet's life in the books of hadith was the result of my study under Shaykh Nasir al-Din al-Albani, a leading hadith scholar of our modern times. That period of study under him was a very fruitful period of my life.

I embarked on this work, starting with the well-known *Sahih* collection by Imam Muslim, with Imam al-Nawawī's commentary. But, as I examined the hadiths in this collection and classified them under separate headings, I was surprised to find numerous practical hadiths that directly relate to women and the interaction between man and woman in different life situations. My surprise was due to the fact that these hadiths were widely different from my own understanding up to that time and the policy I applied in my own life. Indeed, they were different from what was understood and implemented by all Muslim groups I came into contact with, despite their different orientations, such as al-Jam'iyyah al-Shar'iyyah, the Muslim Brotherhood, the Sufi school, and the Salafi school. It was not merely a question of surprise. To me, these hadiths represented an important reason for making a serious attempt to correct our traditional concepts of the role Islam assigns to woman and her involvement in practical life affairs at the time the message of Muhammad (peace be upon him) was unfolding. Readers may share my feeling of surprise when they too read this list of a small number of areas addressed in these hadiths, and in which the Muslim woman plays a prominent part:

- She attends a general meeting in the mosque called for by Bilāl, the Prophet's companion in charge of calling for prayers;
- She takes part in the prayer at the time of the eclipse, despite its greatly extended length;
- She shares in spending the last ten days of Ramadan in the Prophet's mosque;
- She orders men to do what is right and forbids them what is wrong;
- She sits with her husband to share their dinner with their guests;
- She serves her male guests attending her wedding dinner, (*walīmah*), and serves the Prophet a particularly pleasant drink;

- She takes part in the military expeditions led by the Prophet to provide the fighters with drinking water, treat the injured, and help in carrying the dead and the wounded to Madinah; and
- She attends the Eid Prayers with the Prophet when women are favoured with their own address by the Prophet after he finished the sermon addressed to all those present.

Questions surrounding Muslim women, thus, became my main preoccupation, to the extent that I gave up my intended research which aimed at writing the Prophet's biography on the basis of what is documented in books of hadith. In its stead, I decided to begin an in-depth study of women's status in the Muslim community at the time of the Prophet. I intended my research to throw ample light on the degree of emancipation Muslim women enjoyed at the time the Islamic message was revealed. A further motivation to undertake such a study was my continued awareness of the great harm that could result from the predominance of certain concepts that are contrary to the real emancipation Islam ensures for women. Such harm is bound to be compounded if such concepts are upheld by religious groups who are committed to the implementation of Islam in their own lives and in their Muslim communities.

Stating the truth, clearly and simply, concerning the status Islam assigns to women means, in effect, taking a stand in support of God's law, in the same way as stating it with regard to any aspect of Islam. However, the female question acquires particular importance for several reasons, such as:

1. She is attacked on two fronts by two states of ignorance, (*jāhiliyyah*), pulling in opposite directions: the first is narrow, restrictive, and blindly follows our forefathers; and the second is permissive, promiscuous and blindly follows the West. Both types of ignorance represent clear transgression from God's law.

2. She forms half of every human society. In Muslim countries, she is described as society's disfunctional half as she is not allowed to fulfil her part in the upbringing of an enlightened generation of dedicated believers. Nor is she allowed to play her role in the social and political liberation of the Muslim community. This does not contradict the fact that men, the other half of society, are also prevented, to a large extent, from playing their role in this area. This means that women's liberation is a liberation of half the Muslim community. Women will not be truly liberated unless men are also liberated, and the two cannot be truly liberated unless they follow God's clear guidance.

3. In addition to all of this, God has favoured the woman with a wealth of tenderness that makes her especially keen to be religious, provided that she receives proper and wise education. In this context, I may quote two eminent contemporary scholars:

> They are always willing to learn religious principles and moral values, with a clear desire to put them into practice, provided they find the right sort of teachers endowed with insight, and a sound knowledge of the truth.[1]

> Generally speaking, women are more interested in religion than men. It appears to me that the wealth of tenderness and compassionate feelings with which God has endowed women makes them closer to pure human nature, which is essentially religious. Hence, it is not surprising that they are keener than men to be religious and they are more apprehensive of the Day of Judgement.[2]

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1. Abdullah ibn Zaid al-Mahmood, *Al-Akhlāq al-Ḥamīdah li al-Mar'ah al-Muslimah al-Rashīdah.*
2. Dr Yusuf al-Qaradawi, *Fatāwā Mu'āṣirah*, Dar al-Qalam, Kuwait and Cairo, 1996, Vol. 1. p. 34.

What both scholars say is absolutely correct. Authentic hadiths support them. In one such hadith we find 'Ā'ishah, the Prophet's wife, aspiring to taking part in jihad. She asks him: 'Messenger of God! We see that jihad is the best people can do. Should we not take part in jihad?' (Related by al-Bukhari) Another woman, Umm Ḥarām, aspired to be a martyr with those who sail on the sea to fight for God's cause. She put her request to the Prophet: 'Messenger of God, pray to God to make me one of them'. He prayed as she requested. (Related by al-Bukhari) Other God-fearing women are more generous in charity than men: 'God's messenger kept saying, 'Give generously, give generously', and women were the ones who gave most'. (Related by Muslim)

Further Motives

My desire to undertake this task grew every time I read an article or listened to an address on the status of women in Islam. I was often shocked to find some highly respectable scholars, past and present, expressing views that are in conflict with authentic statements made by the Prophet. From scholars of old times, I will give only the following example.

A report in al-Ṭabarī's commentary on the Qur'an attributed to 'Ikrimah and al-Sha'bī,[3] suggests that a woman's paternal and maternal uncles are treated like strangers in so far as they are not allowed to see her adornment. Writers of later generations, particularly those who explain the Qur'an, up to our present day quote this report without verifying its import and checking whether it agrees with the authentic sunnah. It is well known that the Sunnah serves to explain the Qur'an and its applicability. Authentic hadiths make it clear that such uncles are treated like the rest of a woman's close relatives who

3. Both were scholars of the *tābi'in* generation which followed that of the Prophet's companions.

may not be married to her and who are mentioned in the following Qur'anic verse: 'Let them draw their head-coverings over their bosoms and not display their charms to any but their husbands, or their fathers, or their husbands' fathers, or their sons, or their husbands' sons, or their brothers, or their brothers' sons, or their sisters' sons, or their womenfolk, or those whom they rightfully possess, or such male attendants as are free of physical desire, or children that are as yet unaware of women's nakedness. Let them not swing their legs in walking so as to draw attention to their hidden charms. Believers, turn to God in repentance, so that you may achieve success'. (24: 31)

'Ā'ishah reports: 'Aflaḥ, Abu al-Qu'ayṣ's brother, sought permission to enter my rooms after the verse requiring that the Prophet's wives should be screened was revealed. I said, "I would not give him permission until I had asked the Prophet (peace be upon him); for it was not his brother Abu al-Qu'ayṣ who breast-fed me; it was Abu al-Qu'ayṣ's wife who did." The Prophet came in later and I said to him: "Messenger of God, Aflaḥ, Abu al-Qu'ayṣ's brother wanted to come in but I refused to admit him until I have sought your permission." The Prophet said: "What prevents you from admitting him, when he is your uncle?" I said: "Messenger of God, it was not the man who breast-fed me; it was Abu al-Qu'ayṣ's wife who did." He said: 'Admit him, as he is your paternal uncle. May you be successful".' (Related by al-Bukhari and Muslim)

Ibn Ḥajar, a famous hadith scholar who wrote a voluminous commentary on al-Bukhari's *Ṣaḥīḥ* collection, says in a comment on the above hadith: 'It seems to me that by including this hadith, al-Bukhari intends to answer those who object to a woman who takes off her head dress in her uncle's home, whether paternal or maternal. Al-Ṭabarī mentions that both 'Ikrimah and al-Sha'bī were asked the reason for not including uncles in the above verse. They answered: 'Because they may describe their nieces to their sons'. Both felt that a woman was discouraged from taking off her scarf at her uncle's home.

'Ā'ishah's hadith concerning Aflaḥ provides the best answer to them. This is an example of al-Bukhari's meticulous scholarship'.

From contemporary writing there are numerous examples, but I will mention only a few, without identifying their authors so that I can steer away from personal criticism of highly respectable scholars, some of whom were my teachers and for all of them I have the greatest respect. I only wish to emphasise that researchers may leave out parts of what any person may say, for error may be made by anyone. God Almighty is the only one who does not err. We need always to refer to the sunnah of the Prophet, who was infallible, so that we may identify and correct mistakes.

Replying to those who say that a woman need not cover her face in public, a scholar writes: "Before you allow women to reveal their faces, you must wield sufficient power and authority to eradicate every potential evil. So much so that even if there remains only a single pair of eyes to gaze at a woman who leaves her home with her face uncovered, there would be seventy hands to pull those two eyes out of their sockets".

How far removed such language is from the Prophet's own attitude when he saw a young man looking first at a group of women, then at a pretty young woman, and continuing to gaze at her? Jābir reports: 'When God's Messenger moved on, a group of women riding camels passed by, moving fast, and al-Faḍl stared at them. The Prophet put his hand over al-Faḍl's face, but al-Faḍl turned to the other side and stared at them. The Prophet then moved his hand to the other side and put it over al-Faḍl's face to turn it away...'. (Related by Muslim)

'Abdullāh ibn 'Abbās reports: '... A pretty woman from the tribe of Khath'am approached the Prophet asking his advice. Al-Faḍl kept gazing at her, admiring her beauty. The Prophet turned and saw al-Faḍl looking at her. He moved his hand and placed it on al-Faḍl's

chin and turned his face away so that he would not stare at her...'. (Related by al-Bukhari and Muslim)

What did God's Messenger (peace be upon him) do to al-Faḍl ibn al-'Abbās when he repeatedly stared at these women? He only turned his face to the other side. Al-Faḍl was a teenager, a cousin of the Prophet riding behind him on his she-camel. He certainly did not pull his eyes out of their sockets; nor did he chastise him in any way.

Another scholar writes: 'It is clearly confirmed that a woman's face is not part of what a woman must cover.... However, we need to restrict this by not allowing any adornment to be seen on either the woman's face or hands'.

Yet only a few pages earlier the same scholar quotes a number of authentic hadiths confirming that wearing some adornment is permissible, such as kohl on eyelids, and henna on hands.

An eminent scholar says: 'Islam considers that men mixing with women represents high risk. Therefore, it keeps them apart, except through marriage. This means that Islamic society is a segregated, not mixed society'.

I would have hoped of that scholar to clarify that Islam allows women to play their part in social life and to meet men, observing certain values and manners that determine an acceptable standard of propriety. Such mixing, thus, becomes useful and beneficial to both women and society. This is evidenced by a large number of hadiths, some of which we have already quoted in this Introduction. We have more than 300 statements in the two *Ṣaḥīḥ* anthologies by al-Bukhari and Muslim, confirming that women used to play their role in different social areas alongside men.

Another esteemed writer mentions this report: 'God's Messenger said to his daughter Fāṭimah: "What is best for a woman?" She

answered: "That she sees no man and that no man sees her". He embraced her and said: "This is as one generation gives to the next".' The writer then says that it is related in the four *Sunan* anthologies, and al-Tirmidhī describes it as authentic. He thus gives this report as evidence supporting the claim that a woman is required to stay at home.

This report is very poor in authenticity, despite the fact that it is often quoted in speeches, including Friday sermons, and in books and periodicals. The fact is that it is not related by any one of the four cited anthologies. However, it is quoted with some differences by al-Bazzār. Al-Haythamī comments on it in *Majma' al-Zawā'id*, saying: 'It is reported by al-Bazzār with a chain that includes some people unknown to me'. Al-'Irāqī, a well-known scholar of Hadith, says concerning this report: 'It is reported by al-Bazzār and al-Dāraquṭnī in *al-Afrād*, attributed to 'Alī and with a suspect chain of transmission'. All this lack of authenticity centres around the transmission aspect. As for its text, it is clearly contrary to the practice of the female companions of the Prophet during his own lifetime. They participated fully in social life and they met men on numerous occasions.

An Islamic magazine published a question it received from a reader who said: 'We are a group of Muslim students living in a European country. We try to implement Islamic rules as much as possible. One of us has got married and his wife wears the Islamic dress, but she feels very lonely and isolated, because there are no other women who wear Islamic dress or speak Arabic. To what extent can this sister mix with Muslim students here, when she is of course with her husband?'

A respected scholar answered the question as follows: 'Mixing is forbidden in Islam in the first place, because the Prophet says: 'Beware of men entering the places of women....' It may be exceptionally permitted in situations of necessity, provided that it always remains within what the necessity requires'.

Thus, the ruling given by this scholar forbids mixing, except in a situation of necessity, while Qur'anic and hadith statements confirm that the meeting of men and women, which is inappropriately termed 'mixing,' is perfectly permissible. It is confirmed in authentic hadiths that women used to take part with their husbands in receiving their guests and serving them, in addition to meeting men in numerous public and private situations. God, the Legislator, has certainly defined certain manners and standards to be observed so that such participation of women in social life can yield its fruits. Similarly, He has defined manners and standards for marriage, eating, commercial transactions and various other things, so that they remain beneficial to society. The hadith quoted by the scholar giving this ruling speaks of a man entering a woman's place when she is on her own.

These are only a few examples of what scholars and writers, who wish to explain Islamic rulings on social matters, often say. A different type of writer, influenced by the West, takes a hostile attitude to Islam and tries to show its rulings, or what they erroneously think to be its rulings, in a bad light. A friend tells me that whenever he explains an Islamic ruling on a social or political question, a colleague of his, who is a distinguished university professor, says to him: 'This is your personal point of view, influenced by your education and knowledge of advanced Western ideas. It is by no means the true explanation of the Islamic ruling, as it is outlined in the Qur'an, the Sunnah or books of *Fiqh*. This is clearly the case because most Islamic scholars take totally different views'.

It is my belief that we have a duty to explain things to those who have moved away from Islam in a process helped by the errors of respectable and well-meaning scholars and writers. Through the method I have followed in this book, I hope that I have made it easier for people like the university professor I have just mentioned to consider Islamic rulings as they are stated in their original sources. This is the proper way of judgement, rather than looking at

the viewpoints of individual Muslims who may be either correct or mistaken in their sincere efforts.

Objectives

This book is a social and legal study of the status of women at the time of the revelation of the Islamic message. I have attempted to include all the texts that refer, either directly or implicitly, to women, their private and public lives, social relations and wide-ranging activities. Since Islam legislates for the life of the individual, man or woman, as much as it lays down a social system for the Muslim community, a combined social and legal study which looks at the legal implication of social activity provides a comprehensive view of what Islam requires of its followers in their behaviour. By nature, a social study cannot be limited to definitive texts and types of evidence outlining social conditions. It also has to incorporate texts and evidence that have probable and likely import. Delineating historical conditions requires both types. On the other hand, a legal ruling is proven by a text or evidence of definitive or highly likely import, but it may be confirmed with evidence of probable import. This means that texts of probable import may be used as evidence confirming the basic evidence which must be of definitive or nearly definitive implication. Readers will notice that some of the texts cited have only probable implication in reference to the subject matter. It is an Islamic rule that if the evidence is only of the probable type, it cannot be used as a basis for a ruling. Hence, Islamic rulings always rely on definitive or nearly definitive texts. Lesser texts are cited in this book only to complete the social study.

Every action people undertake consists of substance and form, which means that the substance may have different applications, influenced by considerations of time and place. It is exceedingly important to determine the substance of an action, so that if it is judged to be

permissible, its permissibility may be applied in all situations. Likewise, if it is prohibited, the prohibition remains always valid. The forms that such a substance may take, which may differ widely, will all have the same verdict as the substance. This distinction is both necessary and useful in accepting new forms and applications. To give an example: the Prophet approved of women's education, work, as well as social and political activity. His approval applies to the substance and essence of such matters. A question that may be asked here relates to whether the applications that were made during the lifetime of the Prophet in these areas are binding on us so as to make it impossible for us to depart from. Or, are we required to consider new operative factors, and new social conditions to determine our own forms of application? We have tried to identify the new social considerations that have a bearing on women's activity, status and relations within the family, at work, in society and in the political field, as well as the circumstances that influence women's clothing and adornment. Our aim is to determine how a Muslim woman can properly adapt to modern social conditions while implementing the substance of Islamic requirements, so as to remain within what God has permitted.

The ultimate objective of this social and legal study, which defines in absolute clarity how women were emancipated at the time of the Prophet, is to contribute to the re-emancipation of Muslim women in our present time. In so doing, we follow the Prophet's guidance and emulate the process of breaking the fetters that used to reduce women to a lowly social status.

This objective highlights for us an even more important issue that requires consolidated efforts by Islamic scholars, namely: the status of the Muslim mind in our modern times. What is needed here is to break its shackles and release it from the false standards and erroneous concepts that have fettered and deformed it over many centuries. When all these shackles have been removed, the Muslim

mind will be able to benefit by the light of divine guidance. Such liberation of the Muslim mind is the only way to the proper and complete emancipation of women, as also men. It is indeed the way to rebuild the social structure of the Muslim community on solid and proper foundations. It is the mind that dictates human actions. Thus, when the mind is free and benefits by divine guidance, it functions in the right direction, equipped with enlightenment and proper insight. It is my belief that this is the most important issue. Long and compounded distortions have led to serious defects in the Muslims' method of thinking, leading to far reaching imbalance in all aspects of life.

Methodology

The methodology I am following in this book is a comprehensive investigation of the texts of the Qur'an and the authentic Sunnah. I decided on this methodology since beginning to go through the hadiths included in Muslim's *Ṣaḥīḥ* anthology, intending at first to study the Prophet's life on the basis of the Sunnah as I have already explained. I started with al-Bukhari's *Ṣaḥīḥ* and looked at all hadiths that refer to women in any aspect of their lives, then I did the same with Muslim's *Ṣaḥīḥ*, and carried on with other hadith anthologies, analysing a total of fourteen works by eminent Hadith scholars.

God has favoured Muslims with the fact that He has protected His Book and the Prophet's Sunnah, which provides an explanation of the Book, or the Qur'an. The Qur'an will always remain absolutely immune to any form of distortion, since God has guaranteed its protection: "It is We who have bestowed this Reminder from on high, and it is We who shall preserve it intact". (15: 9) By the grace of God, the sunnah has been largely protected by the Muslim community, exerting as it has great efforts to ensure that it remains free of distortion. By God's grace, Muslim scholars have a disciplined

methodology that ensures the protection of the sunnah for all times. This great favour has been granted to the Muslim community for a clear and definite purpose. Earlier communities suffered from distortion creeping into their revealed books. It was a divine rule that God would then choose a new prophet or bestow a new message to set His guidance and teachings back on the right lines. The Muslim community, however, is the bearer of God's final message, and Muhammad is God's last prophet. Hence, God has protected the original sources of the Islamic faith so that people may refer to them at any time, until the end of life. This will remain available to them if they want to follow clear divine guidance, rather than look at religion as a cultural heritage which one generation receives from another, as past communities used to say: 'We found our forefathers following this tradition, and we are only following in their footsteps'. (43: 23) I believe that Muslims truly appreciate the great favour God has granted them in preserving the sources of their faith. Hence, they realize that it is wise for them to always go back to these sources for guidance on what they may differ: 'Believers, obey God and obey the Messenger and those from among you who have been entrusted with authority. If you are in dispute over anything, refer it to God and the Messenger, if you truly believe in God and the Last Day. This is the best [for you] and most suitable for final determination.' (4: 59) I hope that my efforts will help the Muslim community to refer their disputes on issues related to the status of women to God's Book and to the Sunnah of His Messenger.

Following the Prophet's guidance is both required and necessary to set our lives on the right track in all areas. It is even more so in the area of women's participation in social life. This is because the Prophet's guidance in this regard has been fundamentally changed, if not totally obliterated. The practical application of women's participation at the time of the Prophet provided fine examples to be followed. Instead of taking such a lead to develop new applications that are more suitable to new social developments, those shining

examples began to fade away, and indeed totally disappear, from our practical lives. Instead, people have introduced new systems that run contrary to the Prophet's guidance, despite his warning: 'Whoever introduces into this matter of ours something that does not belong to it, it shall be rejected'. (Related by al-Bukhari and Muslim) As for the texts outlining these early examples, they remain documented in books, having lost the great appeal God placed in them. They have been overshadowed by interpretations that have formed a screen preventing people from seeing them for what they really are. Several factors have contributed to this, such as:

- Lingering customs and traditions that prevailed during the time of ignorance either among the Arabs or other communities that embraced Islam, bringing with them some of their cultural heritage;
- The emergence of certain extremist trends in some quarters of the Muslim community, such as their rigid approach to the question of preventing any temptation posed by women. We have devoted a complete chapter to the discussion of implementing the rule concerned with preventive measures;
- Some mistaken or suspect rulings made by earlier scholars, since no human being is immune to error. What magnified the consequences of such mistaken rulings is the fact that they have been recycled over many centuries, due to the stagnation that crept into Islamic scholarship. Imam Ibn Taimiyah rightly pointed out that: 'Every one of the great scholars of the early generations and those who followed them has said or done certain things in which he was unmindful of the Sunnah... This is a wide area that cannot be pinpointed in detail. However, this does not detract from their high standing, although they may not be followed in such matters. God says: 'If you are in dispute over anything, refer it to God and the Messenger, if you truly believe in God and the Last Day'. (4: 59) Mujāhid, al-Ḥakam ibn 'Utaybah

and Mālik say: "You may accept or reject something of what any human being says, except the Prophet', (peace be upon him)'. Al-Shawkānī said: 'Rigid following of an imam so as to make every view attributed to him binding on you and other people means that you raise him to the status of legislator, rather than a person who explains legislation'.

Be that as it may, God has extended His mercy to the Muslims by raising among them people of knowledge and strong faith who continue to shoulder the responsibility of clarifying God's orders. On this point, the Prophet says: 'There will always remain in my community a group that clarifies and defends God's orders, unperturbed by those who let them down or oppose them, until God's command has been fulfilled'. (Related by al-Bukhari) 'This knowledge will be served by competent scholars in every generation. They will purge it of deviation by extremists, fabrication by distorters and false interpretation by ignorant people.' (Related by al-Bayhaqī) 'God sends into this community every one hundred years someone to set its religion on the right track.' (Related by Abu Dāwūd)

- The verification and authentication of the hadith texts by al-Bukhari and other scholars took place after the founders of the four major schools of Islamic law had completed their work. They stated what may be construed as the need to judge their statements on the basis of the authentic Sunnah. Yet most of their followers have not done so, thus contradicting what their imams urged, and in so doing went against the Sunnah in certain matters. Al-Shāfi'ī made a highly relevant statement when he said: 'A hadith is reported to the effect that women may attend the two Eid Prayers. If it is confirmed, then I uphold it'. In a comment on al-Shāfi'ī's statement, al-Bayhaqī says: 'It has been confirmed in the hadith narrated by Umm Aṭiyyah and related by al-Bukhari and Muslim. As such,

all followers of al-Shāfi'ī are bound to uphold it'. The text of the hadith reported by Umm Aṭiyyah runs as follows: "We have been ordered to go out to the Eid Prayer, and to take with us those who are in menstruation, unmarried young women and those that are screened. The ones with a period attend the congregation and share in the supplication, but do not take part in the prayer". (Related by al-Bukhari and Muslim)

Main Conclusions

1. **Main Features of Women's Status**
   - Muslim women during the Prophet's time were fully aware of the status defined by Islam for women. They participated in the entire range of life's activities on the basis of such proper awareness.
   - Women's status according to Islam is summed up in this definitive and comprehensive statement by the Prophet: 'Women are indeed men's full sisters'. This hadith establishes the basic principle of full equality between man and woman, with a measure of specialisation in certain areas.
   - The hadith which describes women as "deficient in mind and religion" is authentic. However, most people have misunderstood it and wrongly applied it. They obliterated the features of the status God has defined for women in the Qur'an and the Prophet explained in the sunnah.

2. **Dress and Adornment**
   - It was normal practice at the Prophet's time that women did not cover their faces when they went out, which is in line with the basic Islamic teachings. The veil, or *niqāb*, which covers the face with the exception of the eyes, was no more than a custom intended as highlighting beauty. It was used by some women before Islam and after Islam was revealed.

- A reasonable measure of make-up or adornment worn on faces, hands and clothing is acceptable, within what is generally approved by Muslim women.
- No special fashion is prescribed for women's clothing, but what is required is that a Muslim woman must cover her body. There is no harm in having several types and patterns, according to what is suitable to social and climatic conditions.
- This flexibility in Islamic requirements has helped to ensure women's freedom and participation in social life.

3. **Social Participation**
   - It is well established that staying at home and being screened are special requirements applicable only to the Prophet's wives. It is also well established that the noble female companions of the Prophet did not follow suit in either of these requirements.
   - Muslim women participated fully in social life, meeting men in all fields of public and private activity. Thus, women were able to respond to the needs of a serious and active pattern of life, benefiting by the flexibility and ease ensured by Islamic law, or Shariah.
   - The only restrictions applicable to such participation are those provided by a set of fine moral values which ensure women's protection without hampering their activity.
   - Muslim women played their full role in social, political and professional fields, according to the conditions and needs prevailing at the time the message of Islam was revealed. Socially, Muslim women were active in several areas such as education, charity work, social services, and morally acceptable entertainment. In the political field, Muslim women chose their faith in opposition to the political authority, enduring for so doing much hardship, torture and persecution. They also migrated in order to serve their faith. Muslim women also

demonstrated their full awareness of public concerns, providing advice on certain political issues and taking part, at times, in political opposition. In the work context, women tended cattle, participated in agriculture, handicrafts, management, nursing, domestic services and cleaning. Through her work, a Muslim woman was able to achieve two goals: (1) looking after herself and her family in a situation where the man responsible for this had either died or was disabled or had a low or no income; and (2) attaining a higher social and moral position for herself, as she was able to make charitable donations and to further God's cause.

Today, we have new social conditions that require a greater degree of women's participation in social, political and professional life. This is perfectly possible within the rules and the framework drawn by Islamic law, which govern all these fields, as well as others, throughout all generations.

- One of the fine results of such participation in social life was the fact that Muslim women achieved a high degree of maturity, in addition to being better able to look after their families and children.

4. **In the Family**
   - The establishment of a woman's right to choose her husband, and her right to terminate her marriage if she dislikes him, when he has caused her no harm, provided that she pays him back the dowry he paid her at the time of their marriage. This is subject to his agreement or to a judge's order given after the judge is satisfied that she dislikes her husband.
   - The division of responsibilities between man and wife went hand in hand with a degree of cooperation that ensured the best fulfilment of these responsibilities.
   - The rights of the two spouses are identical: 'Women shall, in all fairness, enjoy rights similar to those exercised against

them, although men have an advantage over them'. (2: 228) This advantage—or step in the literal sense of the term used in the Qur'anic verse—is that of a man's responsibility to look after his wife, or it may be his right to relinquish some of what is due to him. The rights enjoyed by both parties are those of kind treatment, compassion, sexual satisfaction, sharing concerns and priorities.

- Islam lays down a framework of values and conditions that must be observed in cases of divorce and polygamy. Indeed, a Muslim family cannot function properly when these values and conditions are disregarded. In our modern times, it is up to us to establish systems to ensure that these values and conditions are observed and complied with.
- The family is the woman's main responsibility, but this does not mean that she has no other social responsibilities. Increased social awareness and close cooperation between married couples are two essential factors to achieve proper coordination to allow Muslim women to fulfil their first and most important responsibility, which is the family, and other responsibilities that may be required by society to ensure its progress and advancement.

5. **Sexual Desire**
   - Sex is an important source of pleasure in life, and it is perfectly permissible and wholesome. A human being is given a reward for seeking sexual satisfaction within what is allowed in Islamic law. We need to purge our concepts in this area of the distortion introduced by deviant Sufism, Christian abstinence and ancient oriental creeds.
   - The Prophet and his companions followed a proper method that provides for sound and serious sex education. This ensured a good level of psychological health enjoyed by the whole community, men and women. We must remove the

sort of black-out that our communities impose on everything directly or indirectly related to sex.

- The Prophet (peace be upon him) provides the perfect model for us to follow, whether during the time he had only one wife or later when he had several wives, in his disregard of worldly pleasures and in his self-fulfilment with his wives. Once we have corrected our general concept of sex, we need to correct our understanding of how the Prophet viewed it.
- Facilitating marriage in the early stage of adulthood is an essential characteristic of Muslim society. There are numerous ways, as identified in the Sunnah, to facilitate marriage. Hence, we need to follow that lead and facilitate marriage in our modern society by all possible means, so that the Creator's design is fulfilled. He certainly knows best that which He has created and that which suits His creation. Every difficulty placed in the way of marriage leads people away from obedience of God, and makes it easier for them to approach different types of indecency and even to fall into sin.

The Message of This Book

The Prophet says: 'Whoever calls others to sound guidance will receive reward equal to the reward of all those who follow his call, without diminishing their reward in any way. And whoever leads others astray bears a burden of sin similar to the burden of all those who follow him, without diminishing their burdens of sin in any way'. (Related by Muslim)

By writing this book I sincerely hope to be calling to sound guidance. My hopes are based on a number of points:

Advocating the return to the original sources—the Qur'an and the Sunnah—to review our general conditions and reform the concepts

we have inherited from our forefathers, whether related to women or to other social areas, is a call to follow divine guidance. The Prophet tells the truth when he says: 'I have left with you two things which ensure that you will never go astray as long as you follow them: God's Book and my Sunnah'. (Related by Mālik in *al-Muwatta'*)

The advocacy of making the sunnah known to people, and that rulings given by scholars should be accompanied by appropriate evidence from the Qur'an and the sunnah, is also a call to follow sound guidance. This is the proper way for people to know the teachings of their faith and to learn at the same time the Qur'anic verses and the hadiths of the Prophet which enlighten their hearts and minds. Thus, they will enjoy divine guidance with ease and comfort, just as they enjoy fresh air, water, sunshine and moonlight. In this way, the texts that define Islamic rulings will become widely known, instead of being screened by the statements of different people.

It is permissible to leave women's faces uncovered; it is permissible for women to participate in social life together with men. This permissibility is a call to sound guidance. Divine guidance aims to lift hardship from people. God says in the Qur'an: 'He has laid no hardship on you in [anything that pertains to] religion'. (22: 78). My call here is addressed to two groups of people:

The first group is composed of people who claim that it is forbidden for a woman to uncover her face and forbid all forms of female participation in social life, regardless of the strong need for such participation or its being guided by Islamic morality. I call on this group to validate Islamic rulings and to beware of what the Prophet warned against when he said: 'A person who forbids what is lawful is like one who makes lawful what God has forbidden'. Both transgress against God's law. When the Prophet guided Muslim women to leave their faces uncovered and to participate in social life, he only wanted what is best for the Muslim community. Muslims

are, thus, able to progress in every good way in life. He also opened the way for Muslim women to undertake gainful employment, beginning with seeking education, teaching, helping her husband who may not be able to earn enough, and to participate in useful social activity, or positive political activity that aims to consolidate what is good and opposes deviation.

The second group are people who contravene God's law through permissive practices and unrestricted mixing. I call on these to obey God and to commit themselves only to what He has permitted. This means that they must cover what God has ordered to be covered, and that they should observe the Islamic code that regulates the meeting of men and women. Otherwise, they run the risk of incurring God's displeasure. They also expose themselves to many of the social ills Western society suffers from.

I believe that these texts speaking about the social practice of Muslim women at the time God's revelations were being bestowed from on high and under the caring eye of God's Messenger, and demarcate the way ahead. Thus, we will be able to resist the dictate of personal desires emanating from both groups of extremists and transgressors. It behoves us to take our lead from the practice of the Prophet's female companions so that we may move out of darkness and into the light, and that we may be rid of our state of ignorance as they rid themselves of theirs. We should also be wary of the warning from God's Messenger when he said: 'You shall certainly follow the ways of communities before you, inch by inch and foot by foot, to the extent that if they enter a lizard's hole, you would follow them'. His companions asked whether he meant the Jews and the Christians, to which he replied: 'Who else?' (Related by al-Bukhari and Muslim)

The transgressors have followed their most recent predecessors, by which I mean the present Western civilisation that promotes nudity, permissiveness and promiscuity. On the other hand, the extremists

have followed the earliest and the middle communities of their predecessors. I am particularly referring to the restrictive traditions that prevailed among the Israelites in ancient times and in the Christian Church during the Middle Ages. The irony is that the extremists often accuse the transgressors of entering the lizard's hole in imitation of their predecessors, oblivious to what they themselves do when they shackle themselves and their women with the fetters Islam has been keen to break. God says in the Qur'an: 'My Grace encompasses all things; so I will confer it on those who steer away from evil, and spend in charity, and who believe in Our signs—those who follow the Messenger, the unlettered Prophet whom they shall find described in the Torah and the Gospel that are with them. He commands them to do what is right and forbids them to do what is wrong, and makes lawful to them the good things of life and forbids them all that is foul. He lifts from them their burdens and the shackles that weigh upon them. Those, therefore, who believe in him, honour and support him, and follow the light that has been bestowed from on high through him shall indeed be successful'. (7: 156-7)

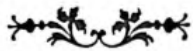
Finally, may I say to my readers that it is God who provides guidance and enacts the laws. His Messenger is the one who delivered God's message and explained it. My personal role is merely to present God's guidance and its explanation by the Prophet. I have also expressed my views in my classification of texts and my comments. Now that the reader is clear concerning what God has legislated in this area and the explanation provided by His Messenger, it is up to the reader to accept or reject my view. Indeed, the reader may put aside every word of mine and look at the texts themselves. They enlighten the way for those who seek to know the truth of God's guidance.

CHAPTER I

Woman's Status as Outlined in the Qur'an

CHAPTER SUMMARY:

- One human origin
- The woman's human responsibility
- Liberation from the shackles of ignorance
- The establishment of the woman's personality
- The woman's independence
- Her position in the family
- The duty of migration from the land of unbelief
- The duty of migration to Madinah
- Giving her own pledge of allegiance
- Implementation of the duty of enjoining right and forbidding wrong
- Facing difficulties
- Sharing in the fulfilment of duties
- Legal responsibility
- Protection of her reputation and integrity
- Mutual temptation between men and women
- Sharing in social life and meeting men
- Famous women



Woman's Status as Outlined in the Qur'an

I suppose we do not need to say much about the status of women prior to Islam, or the misery and hardship women had to endure both in Arabia and in the rest of the world. Volumes have been written on this subject. Reference may be made to books like Durant's *Story of Civilization* for further and detailed information. However, certain aspects of the status of women in pre-Islamic Arabia will be shown in our discussion. Our main focus in this book is to show how Islam changed the woman's standing in society, assigning to her a highly respectable position and serious responsibilities, both at home and outside, and giving her full participation in social life. As centuries rolled by, a deterioration in the Muslim woman's status began to creep in, reaching its lowest ebb around the beginning of the fourteenth century of the Islamic calendar, or the last decades of the nineteenth century.

Western colonialism brought about a shock wave affecting all Muslim communities, and which produced two opposite trends. The first was the dazzling caused by the glitter of Western civilisation, that attracted a kind of full imitation, taking its negative points with

the positive too. The other was to give it a blind eye and look inward, upholding inherited traditions whether good or bad. When their impact withered away, each of these two trends began to examine its position, modifying its attitude, in varying degrees, towards women. In Muslim society there appeared different models, some of which adhere, albeit in different ways, to Islamic law, and others deviate from it in one way or another. It is hoped that, with more dedicated efforts on the part of Islamic scholars, more faithful adherence to Islamic teachings will be achieved so that Islamic society regains its health as Muslim women fully can regain their full Islamic status. This is the only way to achieve real progress.

Divine address, both in the Qur'an and the sunnah, is made to men and women in equal measure. This is the standard position, starting with acknowledging human dignity in order to establish responsibility for criminal offences. Nevertheless, there are distinctions stated with absolute clarity. Therefore, equality is the standard position, while distinction is the exception. To lose sight of this principle is a grave error, and to go against it constitutes a violation of divine law.

Recalling this equality, Imam Ibn Rushd says: 'The standard position is that they have the same status, unless a legitimate distinction is unambiguously stated'.

At times, women are mentioned specifically with men in divine address, but this is a gesture of divine grace made to emphasise their equality.

The Same Origin

God says in the Qur'an: 'Mankind, fear your Lord, who has created you from a single soul, and from it created its mate, and from the two of them spread abroad so many men and women. Fear God, in whose name you appeal to one another, and be mindful of your ties of kinship. Indeed, God is ever watching over you'. (4: 1)

And He also says: 'Whoever does righteous deeds, whether man or woman, and is a believer, We shall most certainly give a good life. And We shall indeed reward these according to the best that they ever did'. (16: 97)

Removing Injustice

Islam takes effective measures to liberate women from the injustice imposed on them in times of ignorance, such as:

- Being upset and depressed at the birth of a girl;
- Keeping one's daughters in a state of humiliation, and
- Burying a girl alive for fear of shame or poverty.

God says in the Qur'an: 'When any of them is given the happy news of the birth of a girl, his face darkens and he is filled with gloom. He tries to avoid all people on account of the [allegedly] bad news he has received, [debating within himself]: shall he keep the child despite the shame he feels, or shall he bury it in the dust? Evil indeed is their judgement'. (16: 58-59)

He also says: 'When the infant girl, buried alive, is asked for what crime she was slain'. (81: 8-9)

Forbidding women certain good things:

'They also say: "That which is in the wombs of these cattle is reserved to our males and forbidden to our women". But if it be stillborn, they all partake of it. He will requite them for all their false assertions. He is Wise, All-Knowing.' (6: 139)

Treating women as inanimate objects that may be inherited, and subjecting women to forced marriages:

'Believers, it is unlawful for you to inherit women against their will, or to bar them from remarrying so that you may make off with part

of what you have given them, except when they are guilty of a flagrant indecency. Consort with them in a goodly manner. Even if you are averse to them, it may well be that you are averse to something in which God has placed much good.' (4: 19)

The Qur'an stresses the independent personality and equal status of women, mentioning them alongside men:
"We said: Adam, this is indeed a foe to you and your wife; so let him not drive the two of you out of the Garden, for then you will be plunged into affliction.' (20: 117)

The Qur'an frequently makes it clear that Eve was not the one behind Adam's sin, as some people falsely allege. God says in the Qur'an: 'For all men and women who have submitted themselves to God—' all believing men and believing women, and all truly devout men and truly devout women, and all men and women who are true to their word, and all men and women who are patient in adversity, and all men and women who humble themselves before God, and all men and women who give in charity, and all men and women who fast, and all men and women who are mindful of their chastity, and all men and women who always remember God: for all of them God has prepared forgiveness of sins and a mighty reward'. (33: 35)

Independent personality:
Islam clearly treats women as having their own independent status and, as such, they make their choice whether to be believers or unbelievers. God states in the Qur'an: 'God has given examples of unbelievers: Noah's wife and Lot's wife: they were married to two of our righteous servants but betrayed them. Their husbands could be of no avail to them against God. They were told: 'Enter both of you the Fire with all those who will enter it'. God has also given examples of believers: Pharaoh's wife, who said: "My Lord! Build for me a mansion in heaven near You, and save me from Pharaoh and his doings, and save me from the wrongdoing folk". And in Mary, the

daughter of 'Imrān, who guarded her chastity, and We breathed of Our spirit into her, and who accepted the truth of her Lord's words and His revealed Books. She was truly devout'. (66: 10-12)

Woman's Role in the Family

- Man's Consort: God says in the Qur'an: 'Among His signs is that He creates for you mates out of your own kind, so that you might incline towards them, and He engenders love and tenderness between you. In this, there are signs indeed for people who think'. (30: 21)
- Balancing Rights and Duties: 'Women shall, in all fairness, enjoy rights similar to those exercised against them, although men have an advantage over them. God is Almighty, Wise.' (2: 228)
- Regulated polygamy: God says in the Qur'an: 'If you fear that you may not deal fairly by the orphans, you may marry of other women as may be agreeable to you, two or three or four. But if you fear that you will not be able to maintain fairness between them, then marry only one, or those whom your right hands possess. That makes it more likely that you will not do injustice'. (4: 3)

  He also says: 'In no way can you maintain equity between your wives, even though you may be keen to do so. Do not, then, be totally partial towards one to the exclusion of the other, leaving her, as it were, in a state of suspense. If you put things to rights and are God-fearing, God is indeed Much-Forgiving, Ever Merciful'. (4: 129)
- Regulated divorce: 'Divorce may be [revoked] twice, whereupon a woman may either be retained in fairness or released with kindness. It is unlawful for you to take back from women anything of what you have given them [as dowry], unless

they both [husband and wife] fear that they may not be able to keep within the bounds set by God. If you have cause to fear that they would not be able to keep within the bounds set by God, it shall be no offence for either of them if she gives up whatever she may in order to free herself. These are the bounds set by God; do not, then, transgress them. Those who transgress the bounds set by God are wrongdoers indeed.' (2: 229)

- Rights of divorced women and widows:

  1. The right to be reunited in marriage after divorce. 'And when you have divorced women and they have reached the end of their waiting-term, do not prevent them from marrying their husbands if they have agreed with each other in a fair manner. This is an admonition for every one of you who believes in God and the Last Day. That is more virtuous for you, and purer. God knows, whereas you do not know.' (2: 232)
  2. The right to breast-feed her child after divorce: 'Mothers may breast-feed their children for two whole years; [that is] for those who wish to complete the suckling. The father of the child is responsible to provide in a fair manner for their sustenance and clothing. No human being shall be burdened with more than he is well able to bear. Neither shall a mother be allowed to cause her child to suffer, nor shall a father cause suffering to his child. The same shall apply to the father's heir.' (2: 233)
  3. The right to wean her child upon consultation with her former husband: 'If, by mutual consent and after due consultation, the parents choose to wean the child, they will incur no sin thereby. Nor shall it be any offence on your part if you engage wet nurses for your children, provided that you hand over what you agreed to pay, in a fair manner. Fear God, and know that God sees all that you do.' (2: 233)

4. The right to seek a new husband after the waiting period: 'Those of you who die leaving wives behind, their wives shall wait, by themselves, for four months and ten days. When they have reached the end of their waiting-term, you shall incur no sin in whatever they may do with themselves in a lawful manner. God is aware of all that you do.' (2: 234) In the *al-Jalālayn* commentary on the Qur'an, the expression: 'whatever they may do with themselves in a lawful manner', is explained as referring to wearing adornments and trying to seek a husband.

- Equality in confirming innocence and the validity of oaths: 'As for those who accuse their own wives [of adultery], but have no witnesses except themselves, let each of them call God four times to witness that he is indeed telling the truth, and the fifth time, that God's curse be upon him if he is telling a lie. However, punishment is averted from her if she calls God four times to witness that he is indeed telling a lie, and the fifth time, that God's wrath be upon her if he is telling the truth.' (24: 6-9)
- Sharing Inheritance. Laying down the sharing principle, God says in the Qur'an: "Men shall have a share in what parents and kinsfolk leave behind, and women shall have a share in what parents and kinsfolk leave behind; whether it be little or much. It is an apportioned share. (4: 7) God gives a clear outline showing the shares of inheritance to be given to each heir, whether son or daughter, father or mother, husband or wife, brother or sister. These are stated in verses 11, 12 and 176 of Surah 4, entitled Women.
- Women also share the duty of migrating from the land of unbelief, unless they are oppressed. 'To those whom the angels gather in death while they are still wronging themselves, the angels will say: 'What were you doing?' They will answer: 'We were oppressed on earth'. [The angels] will say: 'Was not God's

earth so spacious that you might have migrated and settled elsewhere?' Such will have their abode in Hell, a certainly evil end. Excepted are the men, women, and children who, being truly helpless, can devise nothing and can find no way. These God may well pardon, then, for God is indeed most lenient, Much-Forgiving. Anyone who migrates for God's cause will find on earth many places for refuge and great abundance. He who leaves his home, fleeing from evil unto God and His Messenger, and is then overtaken by death, his reward is reserved for him with God. God is Much-Forgiving, Ever Merciful.' (4: 97-100) 'Abdullāh ibn 'Abbās, the Prophet's cousin, said: 'My mother and I were among the oppressed: I was an oppressed child and she was an oppressed woman'. (Related by al-Bukhari) Al-Zayn ibn al-Munīr explains that the verse does not single out women as being oppressed, but makes them equally susceptible to oppression.

- Participation in the migration to Madinah and putting women to the test: 'Believers, when believing women come to you as migrants, test them'. (60: 10) The test to which the verse refers meant that the woman had to make an oath that she did not forsake her home for any reason other than her being a Muslim dedicated to serving God and His Messenger.
- Participation in pledging loyalty to the Prophet: 'Prophet! When believing women come and pledge to you that they will not associate any partner with God, nor steal, nor commit adultery, nor kill their children, nor lie about who fathered their children, nor disobey you in anything reasonable, then accept their pledge of allegiance and pray to God to forgive them. God is Most Forgiving, Ever Merciful'. (60: 12) Certain hadiths mention that the pledge of allegiance given by men was, at times, the same as that given by women. 'Ubādah ibn al-Ṣāmit, a companion of the Prophet, said that once the Prophet was with a group of his companions when he said to them: 'Come and pledge your allegiance to me that you

shall never associate any partners with God, commit neither theft nor adultery, nor child-murder, utter no monstrous falsehood of your own invention, and never disobey me in anything that is right'. (Related by al-Bukhari)

- Mutual patronage among believers, and the duty of enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong: 'The believers, men and women, are friends to one another: they enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong; they attend to their prayers, and pay their zakat, and obey God and His Messenger. It is on these that God will have mercy. Surely, God is Almighty, Wise'. (9: 71)
- Enduring hardships and trials: 'Slain be the people of the Pit, the fire abounding in fuel, when they sat around it, watching what they did to the believers. They took vengeance on them for no reason other than that they believed in God, the Almighty, to whom all praise is due, to whom the dominion of the heavens and the earth belongs. But God is witness of all things. Those who persecute the believers, men and women, and do not repent shall suffer the punishment of Hell, and suffer the punishment of burning'. (85: 4-10) 'Those who malign believing men and believing women for no wrong they might have done shall have burdened themselves with the guilt of calumny, and with a blatant injustice.' (33: 58)
- Joint appeal to God: 'The case of Jesus in the sight of God is the same as the case of Adam. He created him of dust and then said to him: 'Be', and he was. This is the truth from your Lord: be not, then, among the doubters. If anyone should dispute with you about this truth after all the knowledge you have received, say: 'Come. Let us summon our sons and your sons, our women and your women, and ourselves and yourselves; then let us pray humbly and solemnly and invoke God's curse upon the ones who are telling a lie'. (3: 59-61) In Ibn Kathīr's commentary on the Qur'an, the summoning mentioned in

these verses is explained as bringing women and children to take part when such a mutual appeal to God is made. It is also reported that a delegation from the Arab-Christian community of Najran went to the Prophet, including al-'Āqib and al-Ṭayyib, who were among their chiefs. When these two refused to acknowledge that Jesus Christ was no more than a servant of God, the Prophet challenged them to join him in a prayer on the lines stated in the above passage. They promised to do so on the following day. The following morning, the Prophet came to the appointment, bringing with him his daughter Fāṭimah and her two young sons al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn, and sent for the two Najran chiefs, but they refused to take part.

- Women have the same status as men with regard to criminal responsibility: 'As for the adulteress and the adulterer, flog each of them with a hundred stripes, and let not compassion with them keep you from [carrying out] this law of God, if you truly believe in God and the Last Day; and let a number of the believers witness their punishment'. (24: 2) 'As for the man or the woman who is guilty of stealing, cut off their hands in requital for what they have wrought, as an exemplary punishment ordained by God. God is Almighty, Wise.' (5: 38)
- Protecting women's reputations: 'Those who accuse chaste women [of adultery], and cannot produce four witnesses [in support of their accusation], flog them with eighty stripes; and do not accept their testimony ever after; for they are indeed transgressors. Excepted are those who afterwards repent and make amends; for God is Much-Forgiving, Ever Merciful'. (24: 4-5) 'Those who falsely accuse chaste women who may have been unthinkingly careless but remained true believers, shall be rejected by God in this world as well as in the life to come. They shall endure grievous suffering; on the Day when their own tongues, hands and feet will bear witness to what they did. On that Day God will pay them in full their

just due, and they will come to know that God alone is the ultimate truth, absolutely manifest.' (24: 23-25)

- Strong mutual attraction between men and women: 'She in whose house he was living tried to seduce him. She bolted the doors and said: 'Come!' He said: 'God protect me. Goodly has my master made my stay here. Those who do wrong come to no good'. She truly desired him, and he desired her. [He would have succumbed] had he not seen a clear sign of his Lord. Thus We averted from him evil and indecency. He was truly one of Our faithful servants'. (12: 23-24)
- Women are full participants in social life alongside men. Here, are some such forms of such participation mentioned in the Qur'an.

  During Abraham's time. God says: 'Our Lord! I have settled some of my offspring in a valley without cultivation, by Your Sacred House, so that they may establish regular prayers. So, cause Your people's hearts to incline towards them, and provide them with fruits, so that they may give thanks". (14: 37) An authentic hadith includes: "Abraham then took Hagar and her son Ishmael, who was not weaned yet, until he placed her close to the site of the Ka'bah... She stayed there until a travelling company from the tribe of Jurhum passed by... They came over to her when she was standing by the water spring. They asked her: 'Do you permit us to encamp at your place?' She said: 'Yes, but you have no rights to the water'. They agreed. This pleased Ishmael's mother who liked company. Thus, they encamped and sent over to bring their folk to settle with them...'. (Related by al-Bukhari)

  'Our messengers came to Abraham with good news. They bade him peace, and he answered: 'Peace [be to you].' He then hastened to bring them a roasted calf. But when he saw that their hands did not reach out to it, he felt their

conduct strange and became apprehensive of them. They said: 'Do not be alarmed. We are sent to the people of Lot'. His wife, standing nearby, laughed; whereupon We gave her the happy news of [her giving birth to] Isaac and after Isaac, Jacob. Said she: 'Woe is me! Shall I bear a child, now that I am an old woman and this my husband is well-advanced in years? This is a strange thing indeed'. They said: "Do you marvel at God's decree? May God's mercy and blessings be on you, people of this house. He is indeed ever to be praised, glorious".' (11: 69-73) Both al-Ṭabarī and al-Qurṭubī comment that Abraham's wife was serving their guests while her husband was sitting with them.

1. During Moses's time: 'When he arrived at the wells of Madyan, he found there a large group of people drawing water [for their herds and flocks], and at some distance from them he found two women who were keeping back their flock. He asked them: 'What is the matter with you two?' They said: 'We cannot water [our animals] until the herdsmen drive home. Our father is a very old man'. So he watered their flock for them, and then he withdrew into the shade and prayed: 'My Lord! Truly am I in dire need of any good which You may send me'. One of the two women then came back to him, walking shyly, and said: 'My father invites you, so that he might duly reward you for having watered our flock for us'. And when [Moses] went to him and told him his story, he said: "Have no fear. You are now safe from those wrongdoing folk"'. (28: 23-25)
2. During Solomon's time: 'When she arrived, she was asked: 'Is your throne like this?' She answered: 'It looks as though it were the same'. We were endowed with knowledge before her, and we have

surrendered ourselves. Yet that which she used to worship instead of God had kept her away [from the true faith]. She belonged to an unbelieving nation. She was told to enter the court. When she saw it, she thought it was a lake of water, and she bared her legs. Said he: 'It is but a court smoothly paved with glass!' She said: "My Lord! I have indeed wronged my soul, but now I submit myself, with Solomon, to God, the Lord of all the worlds"'. (27: 42-44)

3. During Prophet Muhammad's time: 'God has indeed heard the words of the woman who pleads with you concerning her husband, and complains to God. God has heard what you both had to say. God hears all and sees all'. (58: 1)

Manners to be observed in mixed company:

1. Lowering one's gaze: 'Tell believing men to lower their gaze and to be mindful of their chastity. This is most conducive to their purity. God is certainly aware of all that they do. And tell believing women to lower their gaze and to be mindful of their chastity...'. (24: 30-31)
2. Covering all a woman's body except her face, hands and feet[4]: 'Tell believing women... not to display their charms [in public] beyond what may ordinarily appear thereof. Let them draw their head-covering over their bosoms'.[5] (24: 31)

4. Women's dress code will be discussed fully in Vol. 4. – Author's note
5. Most translators of the Qur'an agree in this rendering whereas literally the term used here denotes the cut of a dress at the top, which is bound to reveal some part of a woman's body. In pre-Islamic days, Arab women used to let the

3. Decency when moving about: 'Let them not swing their legs in walking so as to draw attention to their hidden charms'. (24: 31)
4. Serious discourse: 'Do not speak too softly,[6] lest any who is sick at heart[7] should be moved with desire; but speak in an appropriate manner'. (33: 32)

Famous Women in the Qur'an

Bilqis, the Queen of Sheba

She is described first as the queen of a rich and extensive kingdom:

> 'He [Solomon] inspected the birds and said: 'Why is it that I do not see the hoopoe? Is he among the absentees? I will certainly punish him severely, or I will kill him, unless He brings me a clear warrant' [for his absence]. But the hoopoe did not take long in coming. He said: 'I have just learnt things that are unknown to you, and I come to you from Sheba with accurate information. 'I found there a woman ruling over them; and she has been given of all good things, and hers is a magnificent throne. I found her and her people prostrating themselves to the sun instead of God; and Satan has made their deeds seem goodly to them, thus turning them away from the path [of God], so that they cannot find the right way. That they should not

ends of their head-covering come down on both sides behind their necks. God, here, commands Muslim women to bring these ends to the front so as to cover the cut at the top of their blouses or dresses. — Author's note.

6. This order specifically means that women should not speak too softly with men and must not be frivolous in their speech. — Author's note.
7. This is a reference to any person who is looking for immoral association. — Author's note.

> prostrate themselves in worship of God who brings forth all that is hidden in the heavens and the earth, and knows what you conceal and what you reveal. God, other than whom there is no deity, the Lord of the [truly] magnificent Throne'.' (27: 20-26)

She is shown to have been keen to consult her advisors and the main personalities in her kingdom:

> Said [Solomon]: 'We shall see whether you have told the truth or you are a liar. Go with this my letter and deliver it to them; and then draw back from them, and see what answer they return.' [The Queen of Sheba] said: 'Know, my nobles, that a worthy letter has been delivered to me. It is from Solomon, and it reads, "In the name of God, the Lord of Grace, the Ever Merciful: Do not exalt yourselves against me, but come to me in submission [to God]". Nobles, counsel me in this my affair; no decision on any matter do I take unless you are present'. They said: 'We are endowed with power and with mighty prowess in war; but the command is yours. Consider, then, what you would command'. (27: 27-33)

Furthermore, the Qur'anic account shows her to have been mindful of the consequences of her policies, and a wise monarch:

> Said she: 'When kings enter a country, they despoil it, and make the noble ones of its people the most abject. Thus do they behave. Hence, I am going to send these people a gift and wait to see what the envoys bring back'. When [the Queen's envoy] came to Solomon, he said: 'Is it gold that you would give me? What God has given me is much better than all that He has given you. Yet you rejoice with your own gift. Go back to them, for we shall certainly

come to them with forces they cannot match, and we shall certainly drive them from the land in disgrace, and they will be utterly humbled'.

Solomon said: 'Which of you, nobles, can bring me her throne before they come to me in submission?' Said an afreet of the jinn: 'I shall bring it to you before you rise from your position. I am powerful enough to do it, and worthy of trust'. But the one who was deeply versed in the Book said: 'I shall bring it to you within the twinkling of your eye'. When he saw it standing before him, he said: 'This is by the grace of my Lord, so as to test me whether I am grateful or ungrateful. He who is grateful [to God] is but grateful for his own good. As for him who is ungrateful... My Lord is self-sufficient, most generous'. (27: 34-40)

The Queen of Sheba is further shown in the Qur'an to have been willing to acknowledge the truth once she saw sufficient indication pointing to it:

He [then] said: 'Alter the appearance of her throne: let us see whether she will be able to recognize it, or she will remain unguided'. So when she arrived, she was asked: 'Is your throne like this?' She answered: 'It looks as though it were the same'. We were endowed with knowledge before her, and we have surrendered ourselves. Yet that which she used to worship instead of God had kept her away [from the true faith]. She belonged to an unbelieving nation. She was told to enter the court. When she saw it, she thought it was a lake of water, and she bared her legs. Said he: 'It is but a court smoothly paved with glass!' She said: 'My Lord! I have indeed wronged my soul, but now I submit myself, with Solomon, to God, the Lord of all the worlds'. (27: 41-44)

Mary, 'Imrān's daughter

Here is a woman who vowed to devote her unborn child to God's service:

> 'Imrān's wife said: 'My Lord, I vow to you that which is in my womb, to be devoted to Your service. Accept it from me. You alone are the One Who hears all and knows all'. When she had given birth she said: 'My Lord, I have given birth to a female.' - God well knew to what she would give birth - 'The male is not like the female. I have named her Mary and I seek Your protection for her and her offspring against Satan, the accursed.' (3: 35-36)

The mother, who is referred to in the Qur'an as 'Imrān's wife, made a pledge to God, vowing that the child she was carrying would be devoted to God's service in the temple. Her husband had died when she was still pregnant, but then she gave birth to a daughter, while she hoped for a son, because only boys were vowed to God's service in this way. Hence, her apologetic statement: 'I have given birth to a female... The male is not like the female'. She was at a loss because girls were not suited for serving in the temple. But God, who is the Creator of both males and females, reassured the mother and accepted the girl. Thus, Mary was exemplary in her dedication to God's service, probably better and more attentive to her worship than most men. As the mother sought God's protection for her daughter and her offspring from Satan, God answered her prayers. The Prophet said: 'Every human being is touched by Satan when they are born except for Mary and her son'. (Related by al-Bukhari and Muslim)

However, God accepted Mary:

> Her Lord graciously accepted her. He made her grow up a goodly child, and placed her in the care of Zachariah.

> Whenever Zachariah visited her in the sanctuary he found her provided with food. He would say: 'Mary, where has this come to you from?' She would answer: 'It is from God. God gives sustenance to whom He wills, beyond all reckoning'. At that point, Zachariah prayed to his Lord, saying: 'Lord, bestow on me, out of Your grace, goodly offspring. Indeed, You hear all prayers'. (3: 37-38)

Here we see an example of a woman given much honour and blessings to the extent that even Zachariah, himself a prophet, wonders at such favours, asking her, 'Where has this come to you from?' When he realizes the extent of the favours God has bestowed on Mary, he is motivated to make a request and address it to God: 'Lord, bestow on me, out of Your grace, goodly offspring. Indeed, You hear all prayers'. Mary's honour went even further when she bore Jesus, a child given to her as a miraculous sign from God since he was without a father:

> Relate in the book [the story of] Mary and how she withdrew from her family to a place in the east, where she kept herself in seclusion from them. We, then, sent to her Our Spirit, who appeared to her in the shape of a well-made human being. She said: 'May the Lord of Grace protect me from you. [Do not come near me] if you fear God'. 'I am but an emissary of your Lord', he said, '[and have come] to give you a son endowed with purity". She said: 'How shall I have a child when no man has ever touched me and I have never been a loose woman?' He answered: 'Thus did your Lord speak: This is easy for Me. We will make him a sign for mankind and an act of grace from Us. It is a matter [We have] decreed'. So she conceived him, and retired to a far-off place. And the throes of childbirth drove her to the trunk of a palm-tree. [In her anguish] she cried: 'Would that I had died before this and passed into complete oblivion!' But [a voice] from below called out to her: 'Do not give in

> to grief. Your Lord has provided a brook running beneath you. Shake the trunk of the palm-tree towards you, and it will drop you fresh ripe dates. So eat and drink and be happy. Should you see any human being, just convey this to him: 'I have vowed a fast to the Lord of Grace and will not speak today to any human being'.' At length, she went to her people carrying the child. They said: 'Mary, you have indeed done an amazing thing! Sister of Aaron, your father was not a wicked man, nor was your mother a loose woman!' But she pointed to the child. They said: 'How can we talk to a babe in the cradle?' Whereupon he said: 'I am a servant of God. He has vouchsafed to me revelations and made me a prophet'. (19: 16-30)

The Qur'an refutes the Jews' false allegations against Mary, the virgin. God says:

> 'And so, [We punished them] for the breaking of their pledge, their disbelief in God's revelations, their killing of prophets against all right, and for their boast, 'Our hearts are closed'. Indeed God sealed their hearts on account of their disbelief. As a result they have no faith except for a few of them. And for their disbelief and the monstrous calumny they utter against Mary.' (4: 155-156)

Mary was indeed chosen by God and exalted above all women folk. In the Qur'an, God says:

> 'The angels said: 'Mary, God has chosen you and made you pure, and raised you above all the women of the world. Mary, remain truly devout to your Lord, prostrate yourself (to him) and bow down with those who bow down in worship'.' (3: 42-43)

Thus we see how God elevates a woman's position. Just like He chooses some men, He may choose certain women for excellence. The Prophet certainly tells the truth as he says: 'The only women to attain to perfection were 'Imrān's daughter Mary and Āsiyah, Muzāḥim's daughter.' (Related by al-Bukhari and Muslim)

Indeed, God honoured Mary to the extent that He made her, in character and practices, a role model for others to follow:

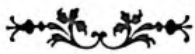
> 'God has also given examples of believers: Pharaoh's wife, who said: 'My Lord! Build for me a mansion in heaven near You, and save me from Pharaoh and his doings, and save me from the wrongdoing folk'. And in Mary, the daughter of 'Imrān, who guarded her chastity, and We breathed of Our spirit into her, and who accepted the truth of her Lord's words and His revealed Books. She was truly devout.' (66: 11-12)

CHAPTER II

Women's Status as Portrayed in the Sunnah

CHAPTER SUMMARY:

- Independent personality:
  The Islamic message is addressed to both men and women from the first day.
  Women accepted the new faith ahead of their husbands and families
- The right of education
- Narrating the sunnah
- Attending worship congregations
- Participation in public events
- Serving the community in a variety of social activities
- Involvement in the protection of the community through political activity
- Enlisting in the Muslim army to undertake suitable tasks
- Undertaking professional work that is compatible with family duties
- Status in the family
- Islam urges taking care of women.
- Women may be named, described and reported, provided that Islamic manners are observed.



Women's Status as Portrayed in the Sunnah

The Prophet says: 'Women are men's full sisters'. (Related by Abu Dāwūd) 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb says: 'In pre-Islamic days, we attached no importance whatsoever to women, but then God revealed whatever He has revealed concerning them, assigning to them the rights He has assigned'. (Related by al-Bukhari and Muslim) A different version is also related by al-Bukhari: 'In pre-Islamic days we cared nothing for women. When Islam was revealed and God mentioned them [in His revelations], we felt that they have rights which we owe to them'.

Women's Independence of Personality

- The message of Islam was addressed to women in the same way as it was addressed to men, right from the outset. Abu Hurayrah reports: 'When God revealed, 'Warn your nearest kinsfolk' (26: 214), the Prophet stood up among his people and said: 'You, the people of the Quraysh! Make sure of your

future life, for I cannot avail you anything against God. You, the people of the clan of 'Abd Manāf, I cannot avail you anything against God. You, 'Abbās ibn 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib, I cannot avail you anything against God. You, Ṣafiyyah, the Prophet's aunt, I cannot avail you anything against God. You, Fāṭimah bint Muhammad, ask me whatever you wish of my own property, but I cannot avail you anything against God'. (Related by al-Bukhari and Muslim)

- Some women accepted Islam ahead of their husbands. 'Abdullāh ibn 'Abbās, the Prophet's cousin, says: 'My mother and I were among the oppressed: I was an oppressed child and she was an oppressed woman'. (Related by al-Bukhari) Al-Bukhari says in his comments on the chapter in which he included this hadith: "Abdullāh ibn 'Abbās and his mother were among the oppressed. Unlike his father, he did not follow his people's religion'. In explaining this hadith, Imam Ibn Hajar says: 'His mother was called Lubābah bint al-Ḥārith of the Hilāl tribe, and she was better known by her appellation, Umm al-Faḍl, after her eldest son'. Al-Bukhari's statement that he, 'Abdullāh, did not follow his father and his people's pagan religion is based on personal deduction, assuming that 'Abbās accepted Islam after the Battle of Badr, but there are different views on this point. The fact is that al-'Abbās migrated to join the Prophet early in the year when Makkah fell to Islam. He was in the Prophet's army and witnessed the fall of Makkah.
- A woman may take up the task of advocacy of the Islamic message and call on her people to embrace it. 'Imrān ibn Ḥuṣayn reports that some of the Prophet's companions were travelling with the Prophet: 'In the early part of the night, they moved on, but when dawn was near, they encamped to take a rest. Soon sleep overtook them and they remained asleep until the sun had risen. The first to wake up was

Abu Bakr. It was Abu Bakr's habit that he would not wake up the Prophet, but would leave him asleep until he woke up by himself. 'Umar then woke up, and Abu Bakr sat close to where the Prophet laid his head and he glorified God aloud until the Prophet had woken up. He came up to us and led the dawn prayer. However, one of us stepped aside and did not pray with us. When the Prophet finished, he asked him: 'Why have you not prayed with us?' The man said: 'I am in the state of ceremonial impurity.'.[8] The Prophet told him to have dry ablution[9] and pray, which he did. The Prophet placed me on a mount in front of him. We were all very thirsty. As we marched on, we came upon a woman who placed her legs in between two large water containers made of leather. We asked her where the water spring was. She said: 'Nay, there is no water spring'. We said: 'How far is your people's encampment and the water spring?' She said: 'A distance of one day and one night'. We said to her: 'Come with us to meet God's Messenger'. She said: 'What is God's Messenger?' We did not give her any choice, but took her to the Prophet and she told him the same as she had told us, but she also said that her husband had died and left her with young orphan children. He told us to bring her water containers, and he wiped with his hand their openings. All forty of us, extremely thirsty, drank as much as we wanted, and then filled every container we had with us, large and small, but we did not give our camels anything to drink, but her two water containers remained

8. A man is considered to be in a state of ceremonial impurity when he, feeling sexual desire, discharges semen, as in intercourse. Apparently in this case, the man had a wet dream.

9. Dry ablution, or *tayammum*, replaces both ordinary and grand ablution, i.e. *wudu* and *ghusl*. A person who avails himself of this concession should find a place of the earth where there is no apparent impurity. He strikes it with his two hands, shakes off any excess of dust, and wipes his face and hands once only.

absolutely full. The Prophet then said to us: 'Bring whatever [food] you have'. He gave her a lot of bread and dates, and she went to her people. She said to them: 'I have seen the most skilful sorcerer, or he is a Prophet as his people claim'. It was through this woman that this isolated group of people were guided to faith. Both she and her people embraced Islam." (Related by al-Bukhari and Muslim) Another version of this hadith adds that "when Muslims fought against the unbelievers in that area, they did not go near her people. She said to them: 'I do not think them deliberately avoiding you. Would it not be better for you to be Muslims?' They accepted her advice and embraced Islam".

- A woman is fully entitled to receive an appropriate level of education to help her discharge her responsibilities. 'Ā'ishah, the Prophet's wife, quotes him as saying: "If anyone undertakes anything of the care of young girls and does well by them, they will be like a shield protecting him from the Fire". (Related by al-Bukhari and Muslim) What could be better for girls than providing them with good education?

  Abu Burdah narrated from his father that the Prophet said: 'Any man who has a young slave girl, and he educates her well and gives her appropriate training in good manners, then he sets her free and marries her, will be doubly rewarded....' (Related by al-Bukhari) If a Muslim is called upon by the Prophet to educate and train in good manners a girl born in slavery, it goes without saying that his own daughter has a stronger claim to his care. The best that he may give her is a fine moral sense and appropriate education. While moral values remain the same, useful education may differ in kind and standard according to time and place.

  'On the day of Eid al-Fiṭr, the Prophet led the Eid Prayer first then he gave his speech. When he finished, he went over to

the women[10] to admonish them. He was holding Bilāl's hand for support. Bilāl placed his robe so that women could throw in it whatever they wanted to give for charity, or *sadaqah*.'[11] (Related by al-Bukhari and Muslim) Another version of this hadith is reported by Ibn 'Abbās, and includes that the Prophet: 'Thought that the women did not hear his speech, so he went to admonish them and bid them to donate to charity'. Ibn Jurayj asked 'Aṭā', both of whom were highly learned scholars, whether he felt that it was a duty of the imam to go to the women after the prayer to admonish them. 'Aṭā' said: 'It is a binding duty, but they do not do it'.

We see how the Prophet, feeling that he was not heard by the women in their distant place praying behind the men's rows, went specially to meet them and admonish them. He felt that they have the same right to be educated and admonished. May God shower His mercy on 'Aṭā' who felt that the Prophet's practice defines a duty the imam owes to women, and he was displeased with the fact that those who led the prayer neglected this duty.

In addition to these clear texts which emphasise the woman's right to education so that she can fulfil her responsibilities, we have a basic rule which says: 'Whatever is indispensable for the fulfilment of an obligatory duty is also obligatory' All the responsibilities of women are either obligatory or recommended.

- Women at the time of the Prophet reported his hadiths and taught them to people.

10. Women pray at the rear of the congregation. As the Eid Prayer is offered by the whole community, in an open space, the congregation would be large and women were unlikely to hear the speech from a distance.
11. This hadith is narrated by Ibn Jurayj, from 'Aṭā', from Jābir ibn 'Abdullāh.

Prior to that, however, we would like to cite the following two quotations. The hadith scholar al-Dhahabī says: 'It is not known of any woman to have lied in the reporting of any hadith'. Another hadith scholar, al-Shawkānī, says: "No hadith scholar is reported to have rejected a hadith merely because it is reported by a woman. Indeed, there are numerous sunnah practices received with unanimous acceptance although they were reported by only one female companion of the Prophet. No one with any measure of knowledge of Hadith discipline would deny this'.

1. 'Ā'ishah, the Prophet's wife, quotes God's Messenger as saying: 'Whoever introduces into this matter of ours something that does not belong to it will have it rejected'. (Related by al-Bukhari and Muslim)
2. Ḥafṣah, the Prophet's wife, reports: 'I never saw God's Messenger (peace be upon him) seated as he offered his voluntary prayer until one year before his death. After that, he might sit as he prayed. He sometimes recited a surah in such a way as to appear longer than other surahs which are actually longer than it'. (Related by Muslim)
3. Umm Salamah, the Prophet's wife, reports that the Prophet once heard people quarrelling outside his home. He went out to see what the matter was. He said to them: 'I am only a human being, and people come to me with their disputes. Some of you may be able to put their case in a more convincing way, and I might think that he was telling the truth and I, consequently, rule in his favour. If I give anyone something that rightly belongs to another Muslim, I am only giving him a brand of fire which he may take or leave'. (Related by al-Bukhari and Muslim)
4. Juwayriyyah, the Prophet's wife, relayed: "The Prophet left her one morning early after he had prayed the Dawn Prayer. She was at her place of prayer. When he came back

later that morning he found her in the same place. He said: 'Have you been at the same position ever since I left you earlier?' She said: 'Yes'. He said: 'After I left you, I said four words three times. Had these words been weighed against what you said throughout your day, they would have outweighed it. These words are: 'Limitless and praised is God in His Glory, as much as the number of His creation, what gives Him pleasure, what matches the weight of His throne and as much as the volume of ink to write His words'. (Related by Muslim)

5. Asma' bint Abu Bakr quotes the Prophet [peace be upon him] as saying: 'I will be standing by the pond [on the Day of Judgement], looking for those of you who come to me. Some people will be taken away before they reach me. I will say: 'My Lord, these belong to me and my community!' I will be told: 'Are you aware of what they did after you had gone? They were always turning back on their heels'.' (Related by al-Bukhari and Muslim)
6. Umm al-Ḥusayn said: 'I performed the pilgrimage with the Prophet when he performed his Farewell Pilgrimage. He spoke at length, then I heard him say: 'If a slave with a cut nose is ruling you in accordance with God's Book, obey him'. (Related by Muslim) The narrator adds: 'I think that she also said 'a black slave with a cut nose''.
7. Umm Kulthūm bint 'Uqbah reports: 'I heard God's Messenger (peace be upon him) when he said: 'He is not a liar who tries to achieve reconciliation between people, reporting what is good or saying something good''.[12] (Related by al-Bukhari and Muslim)

12. This hadith refers to a person who, attempts to achieve reconciliation between two parties by saying to each of them something good about the other party, in order to replace rancour with good will.

8. Umm Hishām bint Ḥārithah ibn al-Nu'mān says: 'It was only from the Prophet's mouth that I memorized *Surah Qāf*. He used to make it his sermon every Friday'. She added: 'Our oven and the Prophet's oven was the same'. (Related by Muslim)

- Women always participated in acts of worship offered in congregation:[13]

1. Obligatory prayers. 'Ā'ishah reports: 'Muslim women used to attend the congregational Dawn Prayer with the Prophet, covering themselves with thick garments. They would then go back home when the prayer was over. They would not be recognized in the darkness'. (Related by al-Bukhari and Muslim)
2. The special prayer at the time of solar eclipse. Asmā' bint Abu Bakr reports: 'I went to 'Ā'ishah [the Prophet's wife who was her sister] when the sun was in eclipse, and I found the people praying. 'Ā'ishah was also praying. I asked: 'What is happening?' She pointed to the sky and said: '*Subḥān Allah*'.[14] I asked: 'Is this a sign?' She pointed confirming that. I stood up and joined the prayer until I almost fainted [as the prayer took too long]. I poured water over my head. When the Prophet finished his prayer, he extolled God's praises then said...' (Related by al-Bukhari and Muslim)
3. Funeral Prayer. 'Ā'ishah reports: 'When Sa'd ibn Abi Waqqāṣ died, the Prophet's wives sent word requesting

13. Women's full participation in social life together with men is discussed fully in Volumes 2 and 3. – Author's note.
14. *Subḥān Allah* may be translated as 'Limitless is God in His glory'. It is a phrase a person may use in prayer to alert the imam to a mistake in the prayer, such as rising to start a fifth *rak'ah* in a 4-*rak'ah* prayer, or alert someone else to a serious situation.

that his funeral should be carried through the mosque to give them a chance to offer the prayer for the deceased. This is what was done, and the Prophet's wives stood in their rooms offering the *Janāzah* Prayer for the deceased for him". (Related by Muslim)

Women participated in the *Janāzah* Prayer for the Prophet on his death in the same way. Al-Nawawī says: 'The fact is that they offered the prayer for the Prophet individually. One group went in and prayed individually. When they left, another group entered and prayed individually, then another group, and so on. Then women entered to pray after the men had finished. When women finished, children went in and offered the prayer'.

4. *I'tikāf* or spending days in the mosque: 'Ā'ishah, the Prophet's wife reports: 'The Prophet (peace be upon him) used to spend the last ten days of Ramadan in the mosque, until he died. His wives did the same after his death'. (Related by al-Bukhari)
5. The pilgrimage: Yaḥyā ibn al-Ḥusayn reports that his grandmother, Umm al-Ḥusayn, said: 'I offered the pilgrimage with the Prophet when he offered his Farewell Pilgrimage. I saw him when he did the stoning at the 'Aqabah and then left...' (Related by Muslim)

- During the Prophet's time, women participated in public activities and celebrations. This took several aspects, such as:

1. Weddings. Anas reports: 'The Prophet once saw a group of women and children coming towards him... after having attended a wedding. The Prophet stood up to greet them, and said to them: 'You are among the people I love most'. He repeated this three times'. (Related by al-Bukhari and Muslim)

2. Religious occasions. Umm 'Aṭiyyah says: '... We were ordered to go out for the prayer on the Eid, i.e. feast day, and even to bring with us unmarried girls used to staying in their private rooms. We even brought with us the girls who were menstruating. These would stay behind the congregation. When the congregation glorified God, they would glorify Him, and when they supplicated, they would join in the supplication, hoping to share in the blessings and forgiveness granted by God on that day". In another version Umm 'Aṭiyyah says about the purpose of bringing those girls who were menstruating: "Thus, they would attend this goodly occasion and join in the supplication by the believers'. (Related by al-Bukhari and Muslim)
3. Receptions. Abu Bakr says: 'We arrived in Madinah at night on the day of our migration. Men and women were on rooftops, while children and servants were in the streets, chanting, 'Muhammad is God's Messenger! Muhammad is God's Messenger!" (Related by Muslim)

ω Women also participated fully in serving the community. This participation took several forms and methods, as well as different purposes. Thus, in the social field women's participation was varied.[15] To give a few examples:

1. Cooperation in social occasions. 'Abd al-Wāḥid ibn Ayman quotes his father as saying: 'I visited 'Ā'ishah and she was wearing a cotton top garment bought for five dirhams.[16] She said to me: 'Look at my maid. She feels it is beneath her to wear such a shirt at home. I had a similar shirt during the Prophet's lifetime. Whenever a woman

15. We will be discussing women's participation in social life in detail in Volume 2. - Author's note.
16. The dirham was the silver currency at the time. Ten dirhams were equal to one dīnār, which was the gold currency.

needed to be adorned for a social occasion in Madinah, she would request to borrow it'. (Related by al-Bukhari)

2. Providing comfortable facilities for visitors. Fāṭimah bint Qays reports: '... Umm Sharīk was a rich woman from the Anṣār who donated much of her money for the service of God's cause. Hers was often the place to receive visitors to Madinah....' (Related by Muslim)
3. Providing health care: "Umm al-'Alā' reports: 'Uthmān ibn Maẓ'ūn was ill at our place, and I nursed him until he died". (Related by al-Bukhari)

- Women took part in the protection of society and ensuring that it followed the right direction. Thus, we see Muslim women at the time of the Prophet and his companions fully active in the political field. To give a few examples:

1. Migration motivated by the desire to join the Muslim society: '... Muslim women began to migrate. Umm Kulthūm bint 'Uqbah ibn Abi Mu'ayṭ was one of those women who migrated to join the Prophet. She had reached marriageable age. Her people came over requesting the Prophet to return her, but he refused....'[17] (Related by al-Bukhari)
2. Advising that the ruler should choose his successor, to ensure the security of the Islamic state at a time when it was at war with external enemies. 'Abdullāh ibn 'Umar reports: 'I visited Ḥafṣah and she said to me: 'Do you know that your father will not nominate a successor?'

17. This was after the signing of the al-Ḥudaybiyah Peace Treaty between the Muslims and the Quraysh. The treaty stipulated that the Prophet would return to the Quraysh anyone of their number who fled to him without his family's permission. God, however, ordered in the Qur'an that no woman believer may be returned to the unbelievers, as they are not lawful for them to marry. (60: 10)

I said: 'He would not neglect that'. She said: 'He is certainly doing so.' I swore that I would take the matter up with him...'.[18] (Related by Muslim)

3. Standing up to a tyrannical ruler. Abu Nawfal reports: '... Al-Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf al-Thaqafī went to see Asmā' bint Abu Bakr after 'Abdullāh ibn al-Zubayr [her son] was killed. He said to her: 'What do you think of what I did to God's enemy?' She said: 'I think you have ruined his life in this world while he ruined your afterlife. God's Messenger mentioned to us that the tribe of Thaqīf will produce a liar[19] and a mass killer. As for the liar, we have already seen him, but I think the mass killer is none but you'. He left her without uttering a word'.[20] (Related by Muslim)

- Indeed women even played an important military role, fulfilling tasks for which they were suited. Here are a couple of examples:

1. Working in the fields of supplies, first aid and transport. Al-Rubayyi' bint Mu'awwidh reports: "We used to join military expeditions at the time of the Prophet. We provided the fighters with water, and served them. We also

18. Ḥafṣah was the Prophet's wife, and 'Umar's own daughter. When her father, the second Caliph, was stabbed and it was ascertained that his wounds were fatal, he was urged to nominate a successor. He was reluctant to do so. Hence, his daughter urged her brother to speak to him about this in order to ensure a smooth succession. 'Umar then appointed a six-man committee to choose the successor from among themselves.
19. This is a reference to al-Mukhtār ibn 'Ubaydellāh al-Thaqafī who claimed to be a prophet but who was fought hard against until he died in battle. - Author's note.
20. Al-Ḥajjāj was an Umayyad governor who led the army against 'Abdullāh ibn al-Zubayr and was ruler of Hijaz and Iraq, before he was defeated by the Umayyads in both provinces. His final battle was in Makkah, when al-Ḥajjāj besieged him and his followers until they died. Asmā', his mother, was the daughter of Abu Bakr al-Ṣiddīq. Al-Ḥajjāj was known for his heavy-handed policies but he was instrumental in consolidating Umayyad rule.

returned those who were killed or wounded to Madinah". (Related by al-Bukhari)

2. Working behind army lines in nutrition and nursing, Umm 'Aṭiyyah of the Anṣār reports: 'I travelled with the Prophet on seven military expeditions. I stayed behind with their provisions, cooking food, providing aid to the wounded and nursing the sick'. (Related by Muslim)

- Women also worked in suitable jobs which did not adversely affect their family responsibilities.

1. In agriculture. Jābir ibn 'Abdullāh reports: 'My maternal aunt was divorced. She wanted to pick the fruit of her date trees [during her waiting period], but a man roughly told her that she was not allowed to leave home.[21] She went to the Prophet and asked him. He said: 'Yes, you may pick your fruit. You may give some to charity or do some kindly deed." (Related by Muslim)
2. In nursing. 'Ā'ishah reports: 'Sa'd [ibn Mu'ādh] was wounded in the Battle of the Moat... The Prophet ordered a tent to be erected in the mosque where he was to be nursed. Thus he would be able to easily visit him'. (Related by al-Bukhari and Muslim) Imam Ibn Ḥajar says: 'The Prophet placed Sa'd in Rufaydah's tent close to his mosque. Rufaydah was a woman who nursed the wounded. The Prophet said: 'Place him in her tent so that I can easily visit him".

- Women's position in the family.[22]

1. A good wife is the best source of happiness in this life: 'Abdullāh ibn 'Umar quotes the Prophet as saying: "The

21. It is commonly thought that a woman may not leave home while she is in her waiting period after divorce or the death of her husband. This hadith clearly shows that she may go about her business.
22. A full discussion of this subject will be included in Volume 7

life of this world is but a source of enjoyment, and the best source of happiness in this life is a good woman". (Related by Muslim)

2. A woman has the right to choose her husband. Abu Hurayrah quotes the Prophet as saying: 'A previously married woman may not be married again unless she is consulted, and a virgin may not be married without her consent'. (Related by al-Bukhari and Muslim)

- Division of family responsibilities:

1. Husband's responsibilities:

   i. Taking care of the family. 'Abdullāh ibn 'Umar quotes the Prophet as saying: 'A man is a shepherd looking after his family and he will be accountable for them'. (Related by al-Bukhari and Muslim)

   ii. Financial responsibility. Jābir quotes the Prophet as saying: 'They [meaning women] are entitled to have provisions and clothing according to what is reasonable'. (Related by Muslim)

2. Wife's responsibilities:

   i. Looking after the children: Ibn 'Umar quotes the Prophet as saying: 'A woman is a shepherd in her husband's home, looking after his children, and she is responsible for them'. (Related by al-Bukhari and Muslim)

   ii. Managing the family home. Ibn 'Umar quotes the Prophet as saying: '... A woman is a shepherd in her husband's home, and she will be accountable'. (Related by al-Bukhari and Muslim)

- Husband and wife cooperate in fulfilling their mutual responsibilities:

1. Cooperation in taking care of the family through consultation and mutual advice. 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb reports: 'In pre-Islamic days we cared nothing for women. Then God revealed whatever He did concerning them and assigned to them their rights. 'Umar said: Once I was deliberating within myself about a particular matter when my wife said, 'It may be appropriate if you do such-and-such'. I said, 'And why do you interfere in something of my concerns?' She said, 'This is amazing coming from you, Ibn al-Khaṭṭāb! You object to being spoken to, when your daughter[23] argues with God's Messenger (peace be upon him) and he may remain angry for the rest of the day!" (Related by al-Bukhari and Muslim) 'Umar also reports: 'We, the Quraysh people, were always in control of our women. When we lived with the Anṣār, we found that their women were in control. Our women were influenced by the Anṣār women. One day, my wife took issue with me over something and argued with me. I made my feeling clear to her, but she said: 'You object to being argued with, when the Prophet's wives argue with him. Anyone of them may remain sulking until the evening'. I was disturbed by that...'. (Related by al-Bukhari and Muslim)
2. Cooperation in financial matters. Abu Sa'īd al-Khudrī reports: 'The Prophet said to Zaynab, Abdullah ibn Mas'ūd's wife: 'Your husband and children are the most deserving of your charity". (Related by al-Bukhari)
3. Cooperation in children's upbringing and education. 'Abdullāh ibn 'Amr reports: 'The Prophet said to me: 'Your children have a right which you owe to them". (Related by Muslim)

23. His daughter was Hafsah, the Prophet's wife.

4. Cooperation in managing the affairs of the household. Al-Aswad reports that he asked 'Ā'ishah about the Prophet's conduct when he was at home. She answered: 'He attended to his family's affairs. When it was time for prayer, he went to the mosque to pray'. (Related by al-Bukhari) Imam Ibn Ḥajar says: 'Another hadith related by Ahmad and Ibn Sa'd and graded by Ibn Ḥibbān as authentic quotes 'Ā'ishah as saying in reply: 'He would patch up his robe, mend his shoes and do what any man does in his home".

5. A woman's right to terminate her marriage. Ibn 'Abbās reports: 'Thābit ibn Qays's wife came to the Prophet and said: 'Messenger of God! I do not take anything against Thābit, either with regard to his faith or manners, but I am worried lest I should be ungrateful'.[24] The Prophet asked her: 'Are you prepared to give him back his garden?' She said: 'Yes', and returned his garden[25] to him. The Prophet ordered him to leave her'. (Related by al-Bukhari)

   Imam Ibn Ḥajar says: 'This hadith raises several points, including that if marital problems are on the wife's part only, recourse may be made to *khul'*, which is the termination of marriage at the wife's request, and she may pay her husband compensation. It is not necessary for there to be disputes between them. Recourse to *khul'* may be made when a wife dislikes living with her husband, even though he may not dislike her or may not take anything against her'. I may add that this is applicable

24. She was unhappy in her marriage because she disliked her husband despite her acknowledgement that he was blameless. She feared that her dislike might lead her to be negligent of her responsibilities and ungrateful to her husband.
25. The garden was the dowry her husband gave her at the time of the marriage. When a woman wants to terminate her marriage, through what is known as *khul'*, she refunds him any dowry he had given her.

if the husband has not done anything to harm his wife either. Ibn Rushd said: 'Just like God has given the man the right to divorce if he dislikes his wife, He gave her the right to terminate the marriage if she dislikes her husband'.

Islam urges taking good care of women

1. As a mother. Abu Hurayrah reports: 'A man came to the Prophet and asked him: 'Messenger of God! Who has the strongest claim to my good companionship?' He said: 'Your mother'. The man asked: 'Who next?' Answered the Prophet: 'Your mother'. The man asked again: 'Who next?' Again the Prophet answered: 'Your mother'. And once more the man asked: 'Who next?' This time the Prophet said: 'Your father". (Related by al-Bukhari and Muslim)
2. As a sister. 'Ā'ishah quotes the Prophet as saying: 'If anyone of my community takes care of three daughters or three sisters, and he does well by them, they will be like a shield protecting him from the Fire'. (Related by al-Bayhaqi)
3. As a wife. Abu Hurayrah quotes the Prophet as saying: 'Take good care of women'. (Related by al-Bukhari and Muslim) This is further emphasised by the Prophet's statement: 'The best among you are those who are best to their wives; and I am the best of you to my wives'. (Related by Ibn Majah)
4. As a daughter. 'Urwah ibn al-Zubayr quotes 'Ā'ishah as saying: 'A woman came to me with her two daughters and asked me for something. I had nothing except one date which I gave her. She split it up and gave it to her two daughters, and left. The Prophet came later and I mentioned this to him. He said: 'If anyone is responsible for girls and looks after them well, they will shield him [or her] from the Fire". (Related by al-Bukhari) Anas ibn Mālik quotes the Prophet as saying: 'Whoever looks after two young girls until they attain

puberty, will be on the Day of Judgement with me like these [and he crossed his two fingers]'. (Related by Muslim)

Mentioning Women's Names, Description and Stories[26]

Having mentioned some hadith texts that delineate the status of Muslim women, we would like to add something that might be thought strange. We will quote now some texts that include the mention of women's names, descriptions or stories. Some readers might be justifiably surprised, wondering how this adds to the clarification of women's status in Islam. Our purpose is to refute the notions that women's names and descriptions are part of what must be kept secret.

Mentioning women's names

- Two men from the Anṣār passed by the Prophet and greeted him. He said to them: 'Hold on a moment! This is Ṣafiyyah bint Ḥuyay'. (Related by al-Bukhari and Muslim) Apparently the Prophet was talking to his wife, Ṣafiyyah, and the two men might not have known her. So, the Prophet clarified the position to them.
- 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb visited Ḥafṣah [his daughter who was among the Prophet's wives] when Asmā' was visiting her. He asked her: 'Who is this lady?' She said: 'Asmā' bint 'Umays'. (Related by al-Bukhari and Muslim)

More importantly, some people were called after their mothers, rather than their fathers. The Prophet and his companions addressed them and referred to them as such:

26. Texts concerning women's stories are available in the unabridged Arabic edition of this book.

- 'It was in the mosque that the Prophet offered the Funeral Prayer for Suhayl ibn al-Bayḍā'.' (Related by Muslim)
- 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn 'Awf reports: 'I was standing in line at the Battle of Badr. When I looked both right and left I saw two young boys... They were 'Afrā's two sons'. (Related by al-Bukhari)
- 'Abdullāh ibn Mas'ūd said: 'You thought that the family of Ibn Umm 'Abd were oblivious!' (Related by Muslim)
- The Prophet said to her: 'Move to Ibn Umm Maktūm's house'. (Related by Muslim)

Describing Women

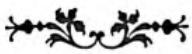
- The Prophet says: "Abraham travelled with Sarah [his wife] and arrived in a city. It was said: 'Abraham was accompanied by one of the prettiest women'. (Related by al-Bukhari and Muslim)
- 'Sawdah bint Zam'ah, the Prophet's wife, went out one night, and she was a tall woman.' Other versions of this hadith describe her as bulky, and taller than other women. (Related by al-Bukhari and Muslim)
- 'The Prophet walked on until he came to where the women were and he spoke to them. A woman with dark red cheeks stood up in their midst and said....' (Related by Muslim)
- 'We were on a military expedition to the tribe of Fazārah... When they saw our archers, they stopped. I drove them. There was with them a woman of their own number, covering herself with an old fur coat, accompanied by her very pretty daughter.' (Related by Muslim)

CHAPTER III

Women's Noble Attitudes

CHAPTER SUMMARY:

- Self-sacrifice
- Aspiration to perfection
- Sincere devotion
- Generosity and Charity
- Dutifulness to parents (in life and after death)
- Patience in adversity
- Maintaining chastity
- Admitting faults
- Keenness to be purged of sin



Women's Noble Attitudes

In this chapter we will look at situations in which different women took noble attitudes after having been liberated by Islam, showing that they attained a very high standard of integrity.

Self-Sacrifice

Ṣuhayb quotes the Prophet as saying: "In former times, there was a king... who was told: 'You remember what you have been guarding against! It has come to pass. People have accepted the new faith'. He ordered that pits should be dug at road junctions, and when they were dug, he ordered fires to be lit. He then gave his orders: 'Whoever refuses to renounce his faith is to be thrown in the fire'. His orders were carried out to the letter. A woman carrying a little boy was brought forward and she stopped fearing to be thrown in the fire. The boy said to her: 'Mother, remain steadfast, because you are following the truth". (Related by Muslim) In this hadith, the Prophet is telling us about a woman who surrendered herself to God before the advent of Islam. She preferred to remain true to her faith, sacrificing her life for God's cause.

Aspiring to Perfection

'Aṭā' ibn Rabāḥ reports that 'Abdullāh ibn 'Abbās said to him: 'Shall I point out to you a woman who is sure to be in heaven?' I said: 'Yes, please'. He said: 'This black woman came once to the Prophet and said to him: 'I suffer from epilepsy and when I have an epileptic fit I may be uncovered. Pray for me'. The Prophet said to her: "You may choose to bear your trouble with patience and you will be in heaven, or you may choose that I pray to God to cure you". She said: "I will bear it with patience; but sometimes I may be uncovered. Pray to God for me that I will not be uncovered'. He prayed for her". (Related by al-Bukhari and Muslim)

Sincere Devotion

Anas ibn Mālik reports: 'On entering the mosque, the Prophet saw a rope hanging between two pillars. He asked about it and he was told: 'This is for Zaynab: when she feels tired, she wants to hold to something'. The Prophet said: 'No. Remove it. Any of you may pray as long as you are fresh. When one is tired, one should sit down".

'Uqbah ibn 'Āmir reports: 'My sister pledged to God that she would travel to the Ka'bah walking. She told me to ask the Prophet about her pledge and he said: 'Let her walk parts of the way and ride at other parts". (Related by al-Bukhari and Muslim)

These two hadiths speak about women who were very keen on voluntary worship, which is highly commendable. However, the Prophet, who teaches us every good thing, expresses his dislike of overdoing it, just as he disliked it when men, such as 'Abdullāh ibn 'Amr, Abu al-Dardā' and others tried it. We believe that those women took his advice, just like those men did, and they worshipped voluntarily, without overdoing it. May God be pleased with them all, men and women.

Generosity and Charity

Abu Sa'īd al-Khudrī reports that on the day of the feast of sacrifice and the day of Eid al-Fiṭr, the Prophet would go out to the prayer place and begin with the prayer. When it was over, he would stand up to address the people when they were still seated in their praying places. If he needed to send some of his companions on a mission he would mention this, and if he had some business to attend to, he would give suitable instructions. He repeatedly advised people to give to charity. Women were the ones who would give most to charity. (Related by Muslim)

Imam Ibn Ḥajar comments: 'The fact that those women were quick to respond to the Prophet's admonition and to give their treasured jewellery for charity, despite their hard circumstances at the time, indicates that they had attained a high position from a religious point of view, and that they were very keen to carry out the Prophet's instructions without hesitation. May God be pleased with them'.

Dutifulness to Parents (Both During Their Life-Times and After Their Deaths)

Buraydah reports: 'I was sitting with the Prophet when a woman came in and said to him: 'I gave my mother a maid, but now my mother is dead'. The Prophet said: 'You have certainly earned your reward, and the maid is back in your possession through inheritance'. The woman asked: 'Messenger of God, my mother did not fast for a month: should I fast on her behalf?' The Prophet said: 'Yes, fast on her behalf'. The woman asked: 'She did not offer the pilgrimage either. Should I offer it on her behalf?'. The Prophet said to her: 'Yes, perform the pilgrimage on her behalf''. (Related by Muslim)

Ibn 'Abbās reports: 'A woman came to the Prophet and said: 'Messenger of God! My mother died before she could fulfil her pledge to fast for God's sake: should I fast on her behalf?' The Prophet asked her: 'Had your mother died before repaying a debt she had incurred, and you paid it off, would that settle it?' She answered: 'Yes'. The Prophet said: 'Then, fast on your mother's behalf". (Related by al-Bukhari and Muslim, but what is stated here is Muslim's version)

Patience in Adversity

Anas reports: 'Ḥārithah, a young lad, was killed in the Battle of Badr. His mother went to the Prophet and said to him: 'Messenger of God! You know how dear to me Ḥārithah was. If he is in heaven, I will bear my bereavement with patience. If it is the opposite, then what shall I do?' (In another version of this hadith she said: If it is the opposite, then I would cry my heart out for him) The Prophet said to her: 'Bless you! Have you lost your mind? Do you think it is one heaven? There are many heavens and he is in Paradise". (Related by al-Bukhari)

Preserving One's Chastity

'Abdullāh ibn 'Umar quotes the Prophet as saying: 'Three people were out walking when it started to rain heavily. They went into a cave for shelter. However, they were trapped by a large rock. One of them suggested that they should pray to God [for their release] mentioning their best past actions... Another said: 'My Lord! You know that I used to love a cousin of mine most passionately. [The version related by Muslim adds here the following: 'I tried to get to her but she repeatedly refused me, until one year there was a famine, and she came to me.] She said that I could not have her unless I paid her one hundred dīnārs. I tried hard until I raised the money. When I sat between her legs, she said to me: "Fear God and do not take me

except lawfully". I rose and left her alone. My Lord! If you know that I only did that for Your sake, then remove this trap'. God removed two-thirds of their trap...'. (Related by al-Bukhari and Muslim)

Admitting Faults

Ibn Abi Mulaykah reports: 'Two women were sewing leather in a room where other people were in conversation. One of them went out with the needle having gone through the palm of her hand. She alleged that a different woman did it to her. The matter was referred to 'Abdullāh ibn 'Abbās and he said: "The Prophet says: "If people are given according to what they claim, some people would be swindled out of their lives and property". Remind her that she should fear God and read to her the Qur'anic verse: 'Those who barter away their covenants with God and their oaths for a trifling gain will have no share in the life to come. God will neither speak to them, nor cast a look on them on the Day of Resurrection, nor will He cleanse them of their sins. Theirs will be a grievous suffering". (3: 77) They did as he said and she retracted her claim'. (Related by al-Bukhari)

Keenness to Be Purged of Sin

Buraydah reports: 'The Ghāmidī woman came and said to the Prophet: 'Messenger of God! I have committed adultery. Please arrange for my absolution through punishment'. He sent her home. On the following day she came again and said: 'Messenger of God! Why have you turned me back home! It may be that you wish to send me home like you did with Mā'iz.[27] By God, I am pregnant'. The Prophet said: 'Now, you may not be punished. Go away and wait until you have given birth'. When she was delivered of a boy, she

27. Mā'iz was the man with whom she committed adultery.

brought him to the Prophet wrapped in a piece of cloth, and said: 'I have given birth to this boy'. The Prophet said to her: 'Go away and breast-feed your baby until you have weaned him'. She went away and waited until she had weaned the child, then brought him to the Prophet holding a piece of bread in his hand. She said: 'Prophet! I have already weaned him and he is now eating ordinary food'. The Prophet gave the child to a Muslim man. He then ordered a hole to be dug in the ground up to her chest. He told people to stone her to death.[28] Khālid ibn al-Walīd hit her with a stone on her head, and her blood splashed on his face; so he cursed her. When the Prophet heard him cursing her, he said to him: 'Khālid, be calm. By Him who holds my soul in His hand, her repentance is so genuine that if one who levied tribute-money unjustly had similarly repented he would be pardoned'. He then ordered that she should be prepared for burial and the Funeral Prayer was offered for her before she was buried". (Related by Muslim)

28. As this is the mandatory punishment when the crime of adultery is established through voluntary and repeated confession, it cannot be waived or reduced by any authority, not even the Prophet's. Hence, the Prophet had no option but to implement it, even though the hadith shows that her repentance would have been sufficient, had she not voluntarily confessed to her crime.

CHAPTER IV

Examples of the Strong Character of Muslim Women and Their Awareness of Their Rights and Duties

CHAPTER SUMMARY:

- Women request God's Messenger's for more education
- Insisting on her right to choose her husband
- Insisting on her right to terminate her marriage
- 'Umar's wife insisting on her right to attend the mosque
- Earning money and donating to charity
- Women answer the call to attend a public meeting
- Umm Ḥarām seeks martyrdom with a naval expedition
- Umm Hāni' extends protection to an opponent and complains against her brother
- Hind bint 'Utbah greets God's Messenger after embracing Islam
- Umm al-Dardā' criticises 'Abd al-Malik, the Caliph.

Examples of the Strong Character of Muslim Women and Their Awareness of Their Rights and Duties

Umm Salamah reports that as she was having her hair done, she heard the Prophet speaking on the platform. As he said, 'You people,', she said to her hairdresser, 'Stop'. The maid [i.e. the hairdresser] said, 'He is only calling the men, not the women', Umm Salamah said: 'I am one of the people'. (Related by Muslim)

Requesting special time for learning

Abu Sa'īd al-Khudrī reports: 'A woman went to the Prophet and said: 'Messenger of God! Men have practically monopolised your discourse. [Another version of this hadith says that 'women told the

Prophet that they were deprived of the chance to learn from him'.] Please allocate for us a day when we can come to you so that you may teach us some of what God has taught you'. He said to them: 'Then assemble on such a day at such a place'. They did and he went to them and taught them part of what God had taught him. He then said: 'Any woman among you who suffers the death of three of her children will find that they will make a screen shielding her from the Fire'. A woman among them said: 'How about two, Messenger of God?' She repeated this twice. He said: 'Yes, even two; even two; even two'.' (Related by al-Bukhari and Muslim)

Ibn Ḥajar comments: 'This hadith shows how keen the Prophet's female companions were to learn more about their faith'.

It is indeed a mark of keen interest shown by the women. Essentially, they felt it was not enough that they should only join the men in learning from the Prophet in the mosque; they wanted their own lesson. The Prophet acceded to their request and arranged its quick implementation.

Insisting on Full Rights

- Not to be forced into marriage: Al-Qāsim reports: 'A woman of Ja'far's offspring feared that her guardian would force her into marrying against her will. She sent a word to two elderly people from the Anṣār. They told her not to worry, because Khansā' bint Khidām was given in marriage by her father against her will, and the Prophet annulled that marriage'.
- To leave her husband: Ibn 'Abbās reports: 'Thābit ibn Qays's wife went to the Prophet and said: 'Messenger of God, I do not take anything against Thābit either in his faith or manners, but I fear to be ungrateful'. The Prophet said: 'Are

you prepared to give him back his garden?'[29] She said: 'Yes'. She returned the garden to him, and the Prophet ordered Thābit to part with her'. (Related by al-Bukhari)

- To attend Congregational Prayer: 'Abdullāh ibn 'Umar reports: "Umar's wife, ['Ātikah bint Zayd], used to attend the congregational prayers of Fajr and 'Ishā in the mosque. Some people said to her: 'Why do you come for these prayers when you know that 'Umar dislikes this and feels jealous?' She said: 'Why does he not tell me to refrain from coming?' They said: 'He is prevented from telling you by the fact that the Prophet said: 'Do not debar the female servants of God from attending mosques.'" (Related by al-Bukhari)

Ibn Ḥajar comments: "Abd al-Razzāq quotes al-Zuhrī as saying that she was in the mosque when 'Umar was stabbed'.[30]

Earning Money and Donating to Charity

- Zaynab bint Jaḥsh worked and donated. 'Ā'ishah reports: '... The one with the longest hand among us was Zaynab,[31] because she used to do some handicraft work and gave to charity'. (Related by Muslim)

29. The woman was appealing to the Prophet to have her marriage terminated. The Prophet's question was to find out whether she was prepared to refund him the dowry he had given her, which in their case was a garden. When she said she was, the Prophet ordered the termination of their marriage.
30. 'Umar was stabbed while he was leading the Fajr Prayer in the Prophet's mosque. He died a couple of days thereafter.
31. The reference here is to Zaynab bint Jaḥsh. The Prophet's wives asked him who of them would be the first to die after him. He said, 'The one with the longest hand'. They tried to measure their hands in order to find out. When Zaynab was the first of them to die after the Prophet, they realized that the Prophet's answer was figurative, denoting that her frequent charity ensured that she reached further than any of them.

- She earned and spent her zakat to help her husband and the orphans under her care. Zaynab, 'Abdullāh ibn Mas'ūd's wife, reports: "As I was in the mosque, I saw the Prophet addressing women and saying to them: 'Give to charity, even though you may have to give of your jewellery'. Zaynab used to support her husband and some orphans under her care. She said: '... I went to the Prophet and I found at his door a woman from the Anṣār having come to ask the same question I wanted to ask. Bilāl came by. We said to him: 'Ask the Prophet whether it is acceptable that I pay my charity [i.e. zakat] to support my husband and the orphans under my care'. He went in and asked him. The Prophet said: 'Yes, and she has a double reward: the reward of giving to relatives and the reward of paying zakat". (Related by al-Bukhari and Muslim)
- Attending a public meeting. Fāṭimah bint Qays reports: '... It was announced to come to prayer.[32] I went out among those who flocked to the mosque. I was in the first of the women's rows, which was the one next to the last of the men's rows...' (Related by Muslim)
- Praying for martyrdom at sea. Anas ibn Mālik reports: 'When the Prophet went to Qubā', he used to visit Umm Ḥarām bint Milḥān, and she would serve him some food. She was married to 'Ubādah ibn al-Ṣāmit. The Prophet once visited her and ate of her food, then he had a nap [at her place]. As he woke up, he smiled. She asked him what had caused him to smile. He said: 'I was shown a group of my followers going for jihad, riding at sea, looking like kings on their thrones...'. She said: 'Messenger of God! Pray to God to make me one of them'.

32. It was common practice to make a public announcement in the streets of Madinah calling people to come to prayer. This was done outside the times of regular prayers, when the Prophet had some announcement to make. It would normally be to tell people of something important that could not wait until the next regular prayer.

He prayed for her as she requested. He then put his head down and slept. He woke up smiling. She said: 'What makes you smile, Messenger of God?' He again said the same thing: 'I was shown a group of my followers going for jihad...'. [In one version, he added that the first army of Muslims who attack the capital of the Byzantine Emperor will have all their sins forgiven.] She said: 'Messenger of God! Pray to God to make me one of them'. He said: 'You are one of the first group'. She went on the maritime expedition during the reign of Mu'āwiyah ibn Abi Sufyān, and when she disembarked, she fell off her mount and died'. (Related by al-Bukhari and Muslim)

- Complaint against her brother. Umm Hāni' bint Abi Ṭālib, the Prophet's cousin, reports: 'I went to the Prophet at the time when Makkah fell to Islam... I greeted him... He said: 'Welcome to you, Umm Hāni'....' I said: 'Messenger of God! My mother's son, 'Alī says that he will kill a man to whom I extended protection. He is Ibn Hubayrah'. The Prophet said: 'We will extend protection to the one to whom you extended it". (Related by al-Bukhari and Muslim)
- A special greeting to the Prophet. 'Ā'ishah reports: 'Hind bint 'Utbah came over and said: 'Messenger of God! In the past, I used to wish humiliation for no one on the face of the earth more than your own household. Today, I wish no one on earth more glory than your own household'. He said: 'By Him who holds my soul in His hand...". (Related by al-Bukhari and Muslim)

Ibn Ḥajar says: "This hadith indicates how wise Hind was and how well she addressed the Prophet".

- Criticising the Caliph. Zayd ibn Aslam reports: 'Abd al-Malik ibn Marwān, the Umayyad Caliph, sent to Umm al-Dardā' some furnishings from his own home. One day, 'Abd al-Malik

was up during the night. He called his servant, but the servant was slow in answering. He cursed him. In the morning, Umm al-Dardā' said to him: 'I overheard you cursing your servant when you called him. I heard Abu al-Dardā' quoting the Prophet as saying: 'Those who frequently curse will not be allowed to intercede or be witnesses on the Day of Judgement". (Related by Muslim)

There are numerous other examples, quoted throughout this book, that shaw Muslim women demonstrated firm personality and good awareness of their rights and duties. A quick reference to these gives us the following short list:

- Umm Salamah gave the Prophet sound advice on the Day of al-Hudaybiyah;
- Khawlah bint Tha'labah disputed with the Prophet about her husband when he swore that she was to him like his mother;
- Asmā' bint 'Umays argued with 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb when he said that her migration to Abyssinia was of less importance than the migration to Madinah;
- Umm Salamah expressed strong objection to 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb when he spoke out against the Prophet's wives' practice of disputing with the Prophet over certain matters;
- Asmā' bint Abu Bakr and other women participated in the special prayer offered at the time of the solar eclipse;
- Umm Sulaym put on a brave face to gently break to her husband the news of their son's death;
- Umm Sulaym took proper precautions against any eventuality when she joined a Muslim army on a jihad expedition;
- Ḥafṣah bint 'Umar showed great interest in settling the issue of succession after her father's assassination;
- Asmā' bint Abu Bakr bravely confronted al-Ḥajjāj and his might;

- ‘Ā’ishah objected to different views upheld by some of the Prophet’s companions, and
- Fāṭimah bint Qays objected to those who claimed that a woman divorced three times by her husband should spend her waiting period in his home.

CHAPTER V

Muslim Women of Distinction

Chapter Summary:

- Khadījah bint Khuwaylid, the Prophet's wife
- Fāṭimah, the Prophet's daughter
- 'Ā'ishah, the Prophet's wife
- Umm Salamah, the Prophet's wife
- Umm Sulaym, al-Ghumayṣā' bint Milḥān
- Asmā' bint Abu Bakr

Muslim Women of Distinction

The Qur'an mentions some women of high calibre who were contemporaries of earlier prophets. In the Prophet's hadiths several distinguished women are also mentioned, including his wives. Relating some events in which such characters were involved further clarifies the main features of the character Islam wants women to have after it emancipated them and enhanced their position in society. It was through Islam that such women were able to attain such a high standard of perfection.

Khadījah bint Khuwaylid

'Alī quotes the Prophet as saying: 'The best woman in heaven is Maryam bint 'Imrān[33] and the best woman in heaven is Khadījah'. (Related by al-Bukhari and Muslim)

A Caring Wife

'Ā'ishah reports: 'The first aspect of revelation to God's Messenger was that his dreams came true. Whatever vision he might have had

33. Mary bint 'Imrān is Jesus' mother.

in his sleep would occur as he had seen. Then, he began to enjoy seclusion. He used to retreat alone into the cave of Ḥirā', where he would spend several days in devotion before going back to his family. He used to take some food with him, and when he came back he would take a fresh supply for another period. He continued to do so until he received the truth while in the cave of Ḥirā'. ...'

Intelligent and Trusting

The hadith narrated by 'Ā'ishah continues: '... He received the truth while in the cave of Ḥirā'. The angel came to him and said: 'Read'. He replied: 'I am not a reader'. The Prophet said: 'He held me and pressed hard until I was exhausted, then he released me and said: "Read", and I replied: 'I am not a reader'. So he held me and pressed me hard a second time until I was exhausted, then he released me and said: "Read". I replied: 'I am not a reader'. He then held me and pressed hard for a third time. Then he said: "Read, in the name of Your Lord Who created—man from a clinging mass of cells. Read—for your Lord is the most Bountiful One, who has taught the use of the pen. He taught man what he did not know"'. (96: 1-5) The Prophet returned home to Khadījah, trembling, and said: 'Wrap me! Wrap me!' They wrapped him and his fear subsided. He turned to Khadījah and exclaimed: 'What has happened to me?' He related to her what happened and said: 'I fear for myself', and Khadījah replied: 'You have nothing to fear; be calm and relax. God will not let you suffer humiliation, because you are kind to your relatives, you speak the truth, you assist anyone in need, you are hospitable to your guest and you help in every just cause'.

Compassionately Caring and Resourceful

The hadith continues: 'Then she took him to Waraqah ibn Nawfal, her paternal cousin who was a Christian convert and a scholar with good knowledge of Arabic, Hebrew and the Bible. He had lost his eyesight,

as he had grown very old. Khadījah said to Waraqah: 'Cousin, would you like to hear what your nephew has to say?'[34] Waraqah said: 'Well, nephew, what have you seen?' The Prophet related to him what he saw. When he had finished, Waraqah said: 'It is the same revelation as was sent down to Moses. I wish I was a young man so that I might be alive when your people drive you out of this city'. The Prophet exclaimed: 'Would they drive me out?' Waraqah answered: 'Yes! No man has ever preached a message like yours and was not met with enmity. If I live till that day, I will certainly give you all my support". (Related by al-Bukhari and Muslim)

A hadith related by Ahmad quotes the Prophet as saying of Khadījah: '... She believed in me when others rejected me; she accepted the truth of what I said when others thought me lying; and she supported me financially when others would not'.

Honoured by God

Abu Hurayrah reports: 'Gabriel came to the Prophet and said: 'Messenger of God! Here is Khadījah coming up carrying a container with some food or drink. When she comes to you give her this greeting from her Lord and from me. Give her the good news that she will have a home in heaven where she will encounter no noise or trouble'. (Related by al-Bukhari and Muslim)

Fāṭimah, the Prophet's Daughter

Taking Care of Her Father

1. When she was young: 'Abdullāh ibn Mas'ūd reports: 'The Prophet was standing up at the Ka'bah praying, while a

34. Waraqah was not, in fact, the Prophet's uncle. Khadījah's reference to Muhammad as his nephew was in accordance with the standards of politeness which prevailed in Arabia at the time.

group of the unbelievers of the Quraysh were seated in their usual places. One of them said: 'Look at this pretender. Who of you would go to the place where the remains of the camel slaughtered by this family are and bring its filthy parts, blood and innards, then when Muhammad prostrates himself, he puts all that over his shoulders?'[35] The most wicked among the group did just that. When the Prophet prostrated himself, putting his head on the ground, the man put that filth over his shoulders. The Prophet stayed in position, while the unbelievers burst out laughing. They were leaning against each other in their laughter. One person went straight to tell Fāṭimah, who was still a young girl. She came hurriedly, while the Prophet was still in his position. She began to take it off him and turned to them with verbal abuse'. (Related by al-Bukhari and Muslim)

2. As an adult: Sahl, a companion of the Prophet, was asked about the Prophet's injury during the Battle of Uhud. He said: "The Prophet received a wound in his face, and his front teeth were broken. His head-cover underneath his helmet was broken over his head. Fāṭimah washed the blood off his face while 'Alī held on. When she realized that the bleeding still increased, she took a piece of a straw mat, burnt it, took the ashes and stuck it to the wound. Thus, she stopped the bleeding'. (Related by al-Bukhari and Muslim)

Patient Housewife

'Alī reports that Fāṭimah went to the Prophet once complaining and showing the effects of the millstone on her hands. She had heard that some slaves had been sent to him. She did not find him at home,

35. The speaker was Abu Jahl. He described the Prophet as a 'pretender' to imply that he was praying in public so that people would think that he was devout. The one who acted on this wicked suggestion was 'Uqbah ibn Abi Mu'ayṭ.

so she told his wife, 'Ā'ishah, what she wanted. When the Prophet came in, 'Ā'ishah told him. She reports: "He came to us when we had just got into bed. We wanted to rise, but he said: 'Stay where you are'. He came over and sat between us, and I could feel his cold feet close to my belly. He said: 'Shall I tell you something that is better for you than what you came to ask for? When you go to bed, say *Subḥān Allah*, i.e. limitless is God in His Glory, 33 times, and *Alḥamd lillāh*, i.e. all praise belongs to God, 33 times, and *Allah-u akbar*, i.e. God is Supreme, 34 times. This is better for you than having a servant." (Related by al-Bukhari and Muslim) Another version of this hadith related by Abu Dāwūd quotes 'Alī as saying: "I was married to Fāṭimah, the Prophet's daughter. She worked the millstone until its marks were clear on her hand, and she carried water in a water-skin until its marks were visible on her neck, and she cleaned the house until her clothes were so dusty'. Another version also related by Abu Dāwūd adds: "And she baked bread until her face changed colour".

Honour from the Prophet

'Ā'ishah reports: "The Prophet went out one morning and he had a loose over-garment, adorned with drawings of saddles and made of black hair. His grandson, al-Ḥasan ibn 'Alī came over and he took him under the cover, then [his other grandson] al-Ḥusayn came to him and he took him in too. Then Fāṭimah [his daughter] came over and he took her in as well. Last came 'Alī and he took him in too. He then quoted the Qur'anic verse that says: 'God only wants to remove all that is loathsome from you, you members of the [Prophet's] household, and to purify you fully.". (33: 33) (Related by Muslim)

Honoured by God

'Ā'ishah reports: '... God's Messenger said to Fāṭimah: 'Would it not please you to be the most honoured lady in heaven?" (Related by al-Bukhari)

ʿĀ'ishah, the Prophet's Wife

'Amr ibn al-ʿĀṣ narrated: 'I asked the Prophet who was the person he loved most. He said: 'Ā'ishah. I asked: 'And who among men?' He said: 'Her father". (Related by al-Bukhari and Muslim)

Her Upbringing

'Ā'ishah had a very special upbringing. Her nephew, 'Urwah ibn al-Zubayr, quotes her as saying: 'I do not recall my parents before they had embraced the faith of Islam. They never passed a day when the Prophet did not drop by morning and evening". In *Fatḥ al-Bārī*, the most celebrated commentary on al-Bukhari's *Ṣaḥīḥ* anthology of hadiths, Ibn Ḥajar writes: "Ā'ishah is the daughter of Abu Bakr and his wife Umm Rūmān. She was born in the Islamic period, eight years or around that before the Prophet's migration to Madinah. When the Prophet died, she was 18 years of age.[36] She died during Muʿāwiyah's reign, in year 58 A.H. but some reports put her death in the following year'.

God's Choice for His Messenger's Wife

'Ā'ishah narrated that the Prophet said to her: "I was shown you twice in my sleep. I saw you wrapped in silk, and I was told, 'This is your wife'. I lifted the cover and I saw you. I thought, 'If this is from God, He will accomplish it". (Related by al-Bukhari and Muslim)

Her Scholarly Status

'Ā'ishah narrated: 'I asked the Prophet about the short wall, 'Is it part of the Kaʿbah?' He said that it was. I asked why have people

36. Such is the popular idea of 'Ā'ishah's age. However, accurate records of people's ages were unknown at the time. I discussed the question of 'Ā'ishah's age in my book, *Muhammad: Man and Prophet* citing several incidents that she was several years older than that.

left it outside its building. He said: 'Do you not see how your people were short of funds?' I asked why the door [of the Ka'bah] is put high above the ground? He said: 'Your people did that so that they would admit whom they wanted to admit and deny entry to anyone they did not want to enter. Had it not been for the fact that your people are still close to their pagan days and I fear that they would feel uneasy about it, I would have put it back into the Ka'bah and put its door close to the ground". In Muslim's version of this hadith, the following is added: "If your people want to re-build it after I have gone, then come and I will show you what has been left out of it.' He showed her close to seven armlengths'. (Related by al-Bukhari and Muslim)

'Ā'ishah narrated: 'The Prophet said: 'Whoever loves to meet God, God will love to meet him; and whoever hates to meet God, God will hate to meet him'. I said to him: 'Prophet, are you referring to hating to die? Every one of us hates to die'. He said: 'That is not what I meant. When a believer is told about God's mercy, forgiveness and heaven, he will love to meet God, and therefore God loves to meet him. By contrast when an unbeliever is told about God's punishment and His anger, he will hate to meet Him, so God will hate to meet that person". (Related by al-Bukhari and Muslim. This is Muslim's version)

Disagreement with Some of the Prophet's Companions

'Ubaydillāh ibn 'Umayr reports: "Ā'ishah was informed that 'Abdullāh ibn 'Amr used to tell women to undo their hair when they wanted to take a bath to remove ceremonial impurity. She commented: 'I wonder at what this man says, telling women to undo their hair. Why does he not tell them to shave their heads as well? I used to take a bath with the Prophet, using water from the same container, and I would use no more than three handfuls with which I washed my head'.' (Related by Muslim)

'Amrah bint 'Abd al-Raḥmān mentions that Ziyād ibn Abi Sufyān wrote to 'Ā'ishah telling her that 'Abdullāh ibn 'Abbās stated: "Whoever has consecrated a sacrificial animal must observe all the restrictions a pilgrim must observe until he has slaughtered his sacrifice'. She said: 'No, it is not as Ibn 'Abbās has stated. I twisted the ribbons for the Prophet's sacrificial animals with my own hand, and then the Prophet put these ribbons on the necks of those animals with his own hands, then he sent them to my father. Nothing that God has made permissible was prohibited for the Prophet until he slaughtered his sacrifice'.[37] (Related by al-Bukhari and Muslim)

Muhammad ibn al Muntashir reports that he asked 'Ā'ishah about a statement by Ibn 'Umar, as he said: 'I do not like to start my day in the state of consecration, yet I would be smelling of perfume". [In a version by Muslim, he is quoted as saying: 'To be covered with tar is preferable to me than doing so'.] 'Ā'ishah said: 'I applied perfume to the Prophet before he had a round visiting his wives. He then began his consecration". (Related by al-Bukhari and Muslim)

37. It is a requirement of most pilgrims to slaughter a sheep and distribute most of its meat to the poor. A pilgrim enters into the state of consecration, or *iḥrām*, and observes certain restrictions as to the sort of garments he puts on and behaviour that is considered acceptable. Once he has completed certain duties of his pilgrimage, most of these restrictions come to an end and his sacrifice is due for slaughter. All Muslims who are not undertaking the pilgrimage are recommended to sacrifice a sheep on the occasion of 'Īd al-Aḍḥā and distribute one-third of its meat to the poor and gift another third to neighbours and relatives. It used to be a traditional practice to mark an animal intended to be sacrificed on these occasions with ribbons twisted in a certain way. In this hadith, 'Ā'ishah refutes the view that if you are not doing the pilgrimage and you buy a sheep to sacrifice on the Day of Eid, you have to observe the same restrictions, quoting what the Prophet did on such occasions. Another restriction prevents a person in consecration for the pilgrimage from wearing perfume. However, it is permissible, or recommended, to wear perfume just before a person enters into consecration, as 'Ā'ishah makes clear in the next hadith.

Badr al-Dīn al-Zarkashī devoted a book to explaining all the points in which 'Ā'ishah disputed the views or rulings other companions of the Prophet expressed. He says in his Introduction: 'I have listed in this book the views of 'Ā'ishah (may God be pleased with her) in which she stands alone in disagreement with all other scholars, whether based on personal opinion or relying on a proper practice by the Prophet, or on sound knowledge unavailable to others, and cases where she disputed the views of her contemporary scholars, or where some scholars of high standing deferred to her opinion, or where she cited evidence for her rulings, or for which she provided a weightier argument'. Al-Zarkashī then lists a total of fifty-nine such cases, explaining them all. In these, she disagrees with no less than twenty-three of the most prominent scholars among the Prophet's companions, including 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, 'Alī ibn Abi Ṭālib and 'Abdullāh ibn 'Abbās.

An Honest Scholar of Humility

Sharīḥ ibn Hāni' reports: 'I asked 'Ā'ishah about wiping over footwear [instead of washing one's feet when performing the ablution, or wudu]. She said: 'Go and Ask 'Alī. He knows this better than me'. [Another version of this hadith quotes her as saying, 'for he used to travel with the Prophet'.] I went to 'Alī with my question and he told me that the Prophet taught that this can be done for three days and nights when a person is travelling, but for one whole day when no travel is involved'. (Related by Muslim)

Kurayb reports that Ibn 'Abbās, al-Miswar ibn Makhramah and 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Azhar sent him to 'Ā'ishah and said to him: 'Convey to her warm greetings from all of us and ask her about offering two voluntary *rak'ahs* after the obligatory 'Aṣr Prayer. We have been informed that you offer them, but we have learnt that the Prophet ordered that no such prayer be offered". Ibn 'Abbās adds that he used to go out with 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb to physically prevent

people from offering such voluntary prayer. Kurayb continues: "I went to 'Ā'ishah and gave her their message. She told me to ask Umm Salamah'.

Looking up to Glory

1. Before the Prophet's wives were screened. Anas reports: 'When the Muslim army was in retreat during the Battle of Uhud and people moved away from the Prophet, I saw 'Ā'ishah and Umm Sulaym, having lifted their skirts I could see the lower parts of their shins. They were carrying waterskins on their backs and almost running to give people drink, before going back to refill their containers with water and coming back to pour it in people's mouths'. (Related by al-Bukhari and Muslim)
2. After they were screened. 'Ā'ishah narrated that she asked the Prophet: 'We have learnt that jihad is the best type of deed. Should we not be allowed to take part in jihad? He said: 'For women the best type of jihad is a properly conducted pilgrimage". Another version of this hadith quotes her question as: "'Should we not join you when you go on a campaign of jihad?' He said: 'For you, the best and prettiest jihad is the pilgrimage, a properly conducted pilgrimage". 'Ā'ishah comments: 'Having heard this from God's Messenger, I will always perform the pilgrimage'. (Related by al-Bukhari)

A Status of Honour

'Ā'ishah mentioned that the Prophet once said to her: "'Ā'ishah! Here is Gabriel offering greetings to you'. She said: 'And peace be to him, together with God's mercy and blessings'. (Related by al-Bukhari and Muslim)

Umm Salamah, the Prophet's Wife

Migration to Abyssinia

'Ā'ishah narrated: 'Both Umm Ḥabībah and Umm Salamah mentioned that they saw a church in Abyssinia where there were statues. When they told the Prophet of this, he said: 'It is a tradition of those people that when a goodly person dies, they build a temple over his grave and put such statues in it. On the Day of Judgement, these will be the worst creatures in God's view". (Related by al-Bukhari)

Acting on the Prophet's Instructions

Umm Salamah narrated: 'When my husband, Abu Salamah, died, I thought: 'He died a stranger in a foreign land. I will lament his departure in a way that people will continue to speak about for long'. I prepared myself for such lamentation and a woman from the upper parts of Madinah came over, wanting to join me in my lamentation. The Prophet met her and said: 'Do you want to bring Satan into a home when God has already driven him out?' He said this twice. On hearing this, I refrained from lamentation'. (Related by Muslim)

Her Marriage to the Prophet

Umm Salamah narrated that when the Prophet married her, he spent three nights with her and then said to her: 'There is no question of disregard to you by me. If you wish I will continue with you up to seven nights. But if you prefer, I will stay three nights and resume my round'. She said: 'Stay three'. (Related by Muslim)

The Prophet is referring here to the standard practice when a married man marries again. If his new wife has not been married before, he would stay with her for seven nights before resuming his round with his other wives, staying one night with each. If his new wife had previously been married, then the rule gives her three nights on her marriage, before her husband then goes to his other wives.

The Prophet, here, is giving Umm Salamah, who had been married before, a choice that would have given her a start of seven nights—in this case he would then spend a week with each of his other wives—or she could be content with the three days before the normal situation of equal treatment resumed.

A Wise, Mature Woman

Al-Miswar ibn Makhramah and Marwān report: 'The Prophet came out at the time of al-Hudaybiyah...[38] When he had completed negotiating the peace agreement [with the Quraysh], he said to his companions: 'You better do your sacrifice now and shave your heads'. Not a single person among them did so. He repeated his instructions three times. Still no one rose to do as they were told. He went to Umm Salamah and told her how sad he was at their lack of response. She said: 'Messenger of God! May I suggest that you go out and, without speaking to anyone, slaughter your sacrifice and then call in someone to shave your head for you'. He did so, without speaking to any of them. He slaughtered his animals and called in someone to shave him. When his companions saw him doing so, they all slaughtered their sacrifices and shaved one another...'. (Related by al-Bukhari)

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38. The Prophet and his companions travelled to Makkah to perform the 'umrah. As custodians of the Ka'bah, the Quraysh were obliged to facilitate entry to all worshippers. However, because of the history of hostility between them and Islam, they were determined to forbid the Muslims entry. Prolonged negotiations ended up in signing a peace agreement that was apparently much too favourable to the Quraysh. It required the Muslims to go back to Madinah without entering Makkah. They were to be allowed such a visit a year later. The Prophet's companions were dejected and depressed. They had high hopes that they would be able to worship freely at the Ka'bah. Now they were to go back 'empty-handed', as it were. Since they were already in consecration, they needed to release themselves from that state by shaving their heads and slaughtering their sacrificial animals. They were very reluctant to do so. The Prophet was worried about them because their lack of obedience put them in a very difficult position. Hence, Umm Salamah's advice.

Umm Sulaym, al-Ghumaysā' bint Milḥān

The Prophet said: 'When I entered heaven, I heard someone walking. I asked who that was, and I was told that she was al-Ghumaysā' bint Milḥān'. (Related by Muslim)

A Special Marriage of Distinction

Jābir ibn 'Abdullāh quotes the Prophet as saying: 'I was shown heaven and I saw there Abu Ṭalḥah's wife'. (Related by Muslim) Indeed her marriage to Abu Ṭalḥah demonstrates the sort of firm believer she was and her high integrity. Thābit al-Bunānī reports on Anas's authority: 'Abu Ṭalḥah came with a marriage proposal to Umm Sulaym. She said: 'You are a man to whom no woman would say no. However, you are an unbeliever while I am a Muslim. It is not permissible for me in my faith to marry you. If you were to become a Muslim, that would be my dowry. I would ask no more. [Yet Abu Ṭalḥah was the richest date farmer in Madinah.] He declared himself a Muslim, and that was her dowry'. Thābit comments: 'I never heard of any woman who had a better dowry than Umm Sulaym's'. [Related by al-Nasā'ī.]

Umm Sulaym certainly made a very good choice. Abu Ṭalḥah became one of the Prophet's distinguished companions. He fought hard for the cause of Islam, and was extremely generous in supporting the Muslim community.

Taking Good Care of Her Husband

Anas ibn Mālik reports: 'One of Abu Ṭalḥah's children by Umm Sulaym died. She said to her family: 'Please do not say anything to Abu Ṭalḥah about his son until I have broken the news to him'. When her husband came in, she gave him a good dinner. Then, after the meal, she put on her best appearance, and he made love to her. When she realized that he was fully satisfied, she said to him: 'Abu Ṭalḥah! If some people lend something to their neighbours, and then they request their article back, can the others refuse?' He said: 'No'. She

said: 'Then, seek God's reward for the loss of your son...'. He was angry, and said to her: 'You kept me unaware until I have stained myself, then told me about my son'. He then went to the Prophet and told him. The Prophet said to him: 'May God bless you both for what you did last night". (Related by al-Bukhari and Muslim. This is Muslim's version)

Asmā' bint Abu Bakr

The Good Housewife

Asmā' reports: 'When I married al-Zubayr, he had nothing at all, neither money, nor a servant. Absolutely nothing apart from a camel he used to carry water and his horse. I used to feed his horse, fetch the water, stitch his leather bucket and make the dough for our bread. I was not good at baking, so some of our neighbours from the Anṣār used to bake for me. They were kind women. I also used to fetch seeds from al-Zubayr's plot of land, which the Prophet gave him, carrying it on my head. That plot was about two miles away from our place'. (Related by al-Bukhari and Muslim)

Eager to Learn

Asmā' reports: 'I went to see 'Ā'ishah, but I found her praying. I asked: 'What is the matter with people?' She pointed to the sky,[39] and I saw that the people were standing up in prayer. She said: '*Subḥān Allah*, which means, limitless is God in His glory'. I asked: 'Is this a sign from God?' She affirmed this with a head signal'. I joined the prayer and stood there until I almost fainted'. (Related by al-Bukhari and Muslim)

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39. This was an occasion of a solar eclipse. At that time, the Prophet called on the Muslim community to come to the mosque and he led them in a special, very long prayer. Asmā' was unaware of this when she went to her sister. Hence, her questions. Her question about a sign from God refers to the eclipse.

In Muslim's version of this hadith reported by Jābir, further details are added: "It was on a very hot day. The Prophet led his companions in prayer. He stood up so long that some of them dropped with fatigue. I poured water over my head'. Another version Muslim relates on Asmā"s authority: 'The Prophet stood up so long that I felt I should sit down, but I saw near me a weak woman and I thought, 'this woman is weaker than me'. So I continued standing. Then the Prophet bowed and stayed long in the bowing position. He then stood up for a very long time. Had a man come and joined the prayer now, he would have thought that the Prophet had not bowed yet'. Yet another version adds further details: 'When the Prophet finished the prayer, he stood up to give a sermon. He mentioned that people will be examined in their graves. People made loud noises and I could not hear the Prophet's final words. When the noise subsided, I said to a man close to me: 'May God bless you. What has the Prophet said at the end?' He told me: 'He said that he received revelation to the effect that people will be subjected to a test in the grave which will be nearly as hard as the testing times of the Impostor".

Brave and Eloquent

Abu Nawfal reports: 'I saw 'Abdullāh ibn al-Zubayr[40] when he was crucified at the entrance of Makkah. The people from the Quraysh and others passed by him. Then 'Abdullāh ibn 'Umar passed by. He stopped there and said: 'Peace be to you, Abu Khubayb! [repeating his greeting three times]. By God, I used to counsel you not to pursue this line! [repeating this three times]. By God, I have known you to

40. 'Abdullāh ibn al-Zubayr was the first child born to the Muslim community after the Prophet's migration to Madinah. Asmā' was his mother. When Yazīd, the second Caliph of the Umayyad dynasty, died 'Abdullāh claimed the Caliphate. All Arabia pledged loyalty to him, and then he won the loyalty of Iraq. However, 'Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan, the Umayyad Caliph, defeated 'Abdullāh's brother in Iraq, and sent an army commanded by al-Ḥajjāj to fight 'Abdullāh in Makkah. 'Abdullāh ibn al-Zubayr was defeated at this battle which he fought to the death. After the battle, he was hung from a tree.

be a pious man who used to fast and offer night worship frequently. You were also very kind to your kinsfolk. By God, a community in which you are the bad guy is certainly a good community'. Al-Ḥajjāj was informed of what 'Abdullāh ibn 'Umar said. Therefore, he sent his men with instructions to get 'Abdullāh ibn al-Zubayr's body down and bury him. He then sent a message to Asmā' bint Abu Bakr to go to him, but she refused. He sent her another message, saying: 'You will come to me, or else I will send to you someone to drag you over by your horns'. She still refused to go to see him, answering his message by saying: 'By God! I shall not come to you until you send those who will drag me by my horns'. When he got her answer, he said: 'Bring me my shoes'. He went out quickly, putting up an air of arrogance. When he arrived at her place, he said to her: 'How do you see what I did with God's enemy?' She said: 'I see that you have ruined his life of this world, but you also ruined your own future life. I hear that you refer to him as "the son of the woman with two belts". I am certainly the woman with two belts. I used one of these to wrap the food for the Prophet and Abu Bakr, and the other was the belt no woman could go without. God's Messenger has told us that the Thaqīf tribe would produce a liar and a destroyer. We have seen the liar already. As for the destroyer, I imagine you are the one'. He left without replying to her'.[41] (Related by Muslim)

41. Asmā' used to bring food for the Prophet and her father, Abu Bakr, when they were hiding in the Cave of Thawr at the time of their migration to Madinah. She split her belt, made of cloth, in two, wrapping their food with one of them. Hence, she was known by the title Dhat al-Niṭāqayn, or the woman with two belts. The reference to the liar points to al-Mukhtar ibn 'Ubaydillāh, who claimed to be a prophet and was followed by some people in Iraq. Asmā"s son, Mus'ab, fought and killed him.

CHAPTER VI

Authentic Hadiths About Women That Are Wrongly Applied

CHAPTER SUMMARY:

- Hadith 1: I saw hell... and I saw that the majority of its dwellers were women.
- Hadith 2: I have never seen such as you: deficient in mind and religion, yet are able to play on the mind of a man of good sense.
- Hadith 3: A woman is created from a rib, and the most crooked part of a rib is its top part....

Authentic Hadiths About Women That Are Wrongly Applied

The first hadith

'Abdullāh ibn 'Abbās narrated: 'On a certain occasion, the sun was eclipsed... The Prophet started to pray and he stood up in prayer for a long time... He finished when the sun was fully clear. He said: 'The sun and the moon are two of God's signs. They are never eclipsed because of anyone's death or life. Should you see either eclipsed, then glorify God'. People said to him: 'Messenger of God! We saw you taking up something as you stood in prayer, and then we saw you moving yourself backwards'. He said: 'The heaven was shown to me, and I reached out for a bunch of its fruit. Had I taken it, you would have eaten of it for as long as life continues on earth. I was shown hell, and I cannot imagine a more ghastly and horrific sight. I saw that the majority of its dwellers were women'. They asked: 'Why is it so, Messenger of God?' He said: 'Because of their denial!' People asked: 'Do they deny God?' He said: 'They are ungrateful to their folk and they deny good turns. You may be very kind to a woman for life but then she may see something you do which is not to her

liking and she would say that she never experienced any kindness from you'.' (Related by al-Bukhari and Muslim)

We need to discuss this hadith from two angles. The first is to look at its import. Does it say that women form the majority of hell's dwellers because evil is preponderant in their nature, far more than it is with men? Had this been the case, they would not be responsible for the evil they do. They could not be held to account for it.[42] The hadith, however, states that they are accountable and that they will have to face punishment for the two offences of ingratitude and denial of kindness. Ibn Ḥajar comments: "The hadith reported by Jābir confirms that the women the Prophet saw in hell were ones with bad characters. It states: 'The majority of those I saw in it were women who, when they are told something on trust they bring it into the open; when they are requested to give they refuse; when they ask a favour they press hard; when they are given something they give no thanks'". This reminds us of a hadith in which the Prophet says: 'I looked at heaven and I found that the majority of its people belong to the poor'. What makes the rich fewer in heaven? It is what they do: either they earn their money unlawfully, or spend it on unlawful things, or hold tight to it refusing to use it in goodly and charitable ways.

Secondly, we need to look at this hadith carefully to learn how all of us, men and women, can steer away from hell. Indeed, hell and its torment are mentioned so that we make the right efforts to ensure that we do not go anywhere near it.

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42. Human beings are accountable for what they do by choice in this life. They are not held to account for what is part of what they naturally behold and of which they have no control. What condemns anyone to God's punishment in the hereafter is the course they choose to take in this present life. This is something they consciously opt for. The Prophet mentions two characteristics that are more predominant among women, but these relate to one's chosen course of action.

How can women spare themselves the torment of hell? The proper way is to make sure that they are not ungrateful to their men folk. This is achieved through proper education first. It is the sort of education that strengthens the God-fearing sense in their hearts and their keenness to do what pleases God. It is also achieved through remembering the Prophet's advice when Satan tries to tempt them into sin. Should they yield to his temptation, they must repent and plead for God's forgiveness. They should also give generously to charity, as God's Messenger has taught them. Abu Sa'īd al-Khudrī reports: 'The Prophet went out to the prayer place outside Madinah on one Eid occasion. He stopped to speak to the women. He said to them: 'You, women, donate generously to charity, [Muslim's version adds here, 'and pray much for God's forgiveness'] for I was shown that you form the majority of the dwellers of hell'. They asked: 'Why is it so, Messenger of God?' He answered: 'Because you often use abusive language and you deny your men's kindness". (Related by al-Bukhari and Muslim)

Ibn Ḥajar comments: "This hadith makes it clear that it is permissible to use harsh advice so as to ensure that a negative characteristic is avoided... It also makes clear that charity, or *sadaqah*, spares the giver God's punishment and further that it may atone for sinful action in personal relations."

How can men spare themselves the punishment of hell? The only way is to avoid doing what is forbidden and to fulfil their duties. One important duty is to take good care of their mothers, sisters, wives and daughters. Such good care includes providing them with good and sound education that reflects in their actions and general behaviour and encourages them to attend congregational worship, including Friday Prayer and night worship [i.e. *Tarāwīḥ* in Ramadan]. This is the proper way to ensure that they fully appreciate the concepts of true faith and the values of a God-fearing life. Women must also be given the chance to do good works that enable them to attend to

such duties as the payment of zakat and giving voluntary charity, encouraging others to do what is right and good, and joining in any good action. All this is part of the fulfilment of men's duty to take care of their women, in response to the Qur'anic injunctions: 'Men shall take full care of women'. (4: 34) "Believers! Guard yourselves and your families against a fire fuelled by people and stones." (66: 6) It certainly falls within the discharge of the trust God has assigned to every man. The Prophet says: 'A man is a shepherd in his household and he is responsible for his folk'. (Related by al-Bukhari and Muslim)

The second hadith:
Abu Sa'īd al-Khudrī reports: 'The Prophet went out to the praying place outside Madinah on one Eid occasion. He stopped to speak to the women. He said to them: 'You, women... I have never seen such as you: deficient in mind and religion, yet are able to play on the mind of a man of good sense'. They asked: 'How are we deficient in religion and mind, Messenger of God?' He said: 'Is it not true that a woman's testimony counts as half that of a man?' They said: 'Yes'. He said: 'This is how she is deficient in mind. Is it not a fact that when a woman is menstruating, she neither prays nor fasts?' They answered: 'Yes'. He said: 'This is how she is deficient in religion". (Related by al-Bukhari and Muslim)

Let us examine this hadith concentrating on three particular aspects: the general import of the Prophet's statement on women and their status, women's deficiency in mind, and their deficiency in faith.

How should we understand the Prophet's words: 'I have never seen such as you: deficient in mind and religion, yet are able to play on the mind of a man of good sense'. We need to look carefully at this statement, taking into account the occasion when it was said, the people addressed by it and its phraseology. We will then be able to understand what it tells us about women and their personalities.

First of all, we must remember that it was said on a festive occasion, one of the two annual feasts in the Islamic calendar, and the Prophet came to address the women and encourage them to be more God-fearing and to compete in good works. Can we imagine that the Prophet, exceedingly caring and kind as he was, would want to degrade women or detract from their good standing on such a happy occasion?

The women addressed by the Prophet were largely from Madinah. 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb says: 'When we [i.e. the Muslims from Makkah] settled in Madinah, we found the people there defer to their women. Our women started to learn the ways of the Anṣār women...'. This explains why the Prophet said to those women: 'I have never seen such as you: deficient in mind and religion, yet are able to play on the mind of a man of good sense'. The way the Prophet phrased his statement makes it clear that he was not stating a general rule or a verdict. He was simply expressing his amazement at the apparent contradiction in the fact that despite women's weakness, they are able to overcome or manipulate men of good sense. Thus, he highlighted an aspect of God's scheme of things, placing strength where weakness is expected, and depositing weakness where we expect to find strength. Should we not look at the Prophet's statement as intentionally providing a gentle nudge in the context of his admonition? Does it not serve as an introduction to an important aspect of such an admonition? Indeed we should see the Prophet's statement as meaning: 'If God has given you such ability to play on the minds of men of good sense, despite your apparent weakness, then you must fear God and use your ability only in what is good and can earn you good reward from God".

We must be clear, then, that the phrase 'deficient in mind and religion' occurs in the Prophet's hadiths only once, within the context of drawing women's attention to the admonition that follows. Never did the Prophet express such an idea in a way that seeks to state a general fact at any time, whether he was addressing men or women.

The second point we need to address is the particular meaning of the Prophet's words: 'deficient in mind'. There are several conditions that can be described as mind deficiency:

1. General natural deficiency in a person's intelligence;
2. Specific natural deficiency that affects certain mental abilities, such as mathematical processes, comprehension or imaginative powers;
3. Temporary, short, specific deficiency which affects a person's mental abilities due to certain circumstances, such as women's monthly cycle, the postnatal period and some times during pregnancy;
4. Temporary, long, specific deficiency which affects a woman's abilities as a consequence of living conditions. This may happen, for example, in the case of women who spend long periods of time fully occupied with the tasks resulting from pregnancy, childbirth, breast-feeding and looking after young children. Some women find themselves confined to their homes for long periods, practically cut off from the outside world. This could lead to a lack of awareness of issues affecting life in general and business and financial issues in particular.

The example cited by the Prophet of women's mind deficiency points clearly to the specific type of deficiency, whether natural or accidental. Whatever area women may be deficient in, such deficiency in no way detracts from their mental powers and their ability to undertake and fulfil all their responsibilities. A most important one of these is taking care of young children. God could not have assigned this responsibility to anyone other than an able and mature person. Moreover, us, men, would never entrust the upbringing of our sons and daughters to someone with an impaired mind or someone flawed in faith.

Certain responsibilities are shared by men and women alike, such as:

- Human responsibility: every human being, man or woman, is responsible for their actions and will have to account for them on the Day of Judgement. This is clearly stated in God's Book, the Qur'an;
- Responsibility for criminal action: everyone is liable for punishment in this present life for any criminal action they may perpetrate. This is also stated in the Qur'an;
- Responsibility for personal action, such as spending one's money, making a contractual agreement, acting as guardian of underage children, among others. This responsibility is agreed upon by all scholars, supported by evidence from the Qur'an and Hadith;
- Holding the post of a judge in business matters, which is approved the Hanafi school of thought;
- Scholarly competence to transmit and report the Prophet's traditions. This is universally agreed upon by all Muslim scholars.

Since the Prophet's statement refers, in all probability, to a specific mental deficiency, the last three types mentioned above are possible. They are not mutually exclusive. Indeed, they may alternate in their bearing. The second type: the specific natural deficiency affecting certain mental abilities, such as business and financial matters, is the one mentioned in the Qur'an in connection with the need for two women to share in giving witness in place of one man: 'Call in two of your men to act as witnesses, but if two men are not available, then a man and two women, whom you consider acceptable as witnesses, so that if either of them should make a mistake, the other will remind her'. (2: 282) This deficiency may not be natural as is the case with other features that distinguish male and female from birth. Yet it becomes almost natural when a woman's sexual organs are fully developed after she attains puberty, and later with marriage

with all that is involved of pregnancy, child birth and breast-feeding. Another factor comes into play to make this deficiency almost natural, which is the development of a woman's distinctive social life. We note the interrelation and interaction between biological and social life on the one hand and mental ability on the other. It is such interaction that may sometimes influence a woman's testimony in court. A woman may appear emotional or impulsive at times, or may be going through hard times, as may be the case during her monthly cycle or advanced pregnancy or when looking after young children in addition to attending to her household duties.

Moreover, the hadith refers to a mental deficiency applicable to women, without defining its stage, leaving this to be addressed by human effort and research. We need, however, to highlight three points: (1) that deficiency in a certain ability may be redressed or outweighed by an increase in one or more other abilities; (2) the Prophet is speaking of women in general. This does not preclude the fact that certain women are endowed with high, or even superior, abilities in the very areas in which women generally may be deficient. Nor does it preclude that such women may be superior to many men. Ibn Taymiyyah says: "The superiority of one race does not necessarily mean superiority of every individual. A man from Abyssinia may be superior in God's sight to the majority of the Quraysh people'.[43] Ibn Taymiyyah also says elsewhere: 'This principle means that urban people are in a higher position than desert people. Yet some individuals among the desert people are better than the majority of urban people'. (3) Specific deficiency, natural or temporary, may be the result of certain biological female functions. This means that it is

43. This is stated in the context of the social values prevalent in Makkah at the advent of Islam. The Quraysh tribe considered itself superior to all Arabs, and to all mankind for that matter. People of Abyssinian origin living in Makkah had to enter into alliances with some Quraysh dignitaries to ensure their own safety. Some were also slaves.

healthy. It helps both man and woman to fulfil their respective roles in life. However, monotonous life at home, where a woman is kept indoors most of the time, could result in serious risks to the life of the woman, the family and to society as a whole. It is a risk that can totally undermine a woman's mental ability, leaving her unable to understand or determine anything around her. This will inevitably result in weakening her role in the upbringing of her own children and, in consequence, her role in society.

Finally, may I say that as we stand today, in the fifteenth century of the Islamic calendar and at the beginning of the twenty-first century, we can serve a better purpose if we initiate some scientific research to study women's mental abilities, so as to understand the exact type, degree and time of deficiency as well as its prevalence among women. Such research should also be concerned with the areas in which women are superior, as well as the degree and time of their superiority. In this way we will be able to render a good service to the Prophet's sunnah, as our past scholars served it in formulating the different disciplines of Hadith study. They were thus able to distinguish authentic hadiths from those which were unauthentic. The service we should endeavour to make should be suited for our time. It should concentrate on doing the research necessary to fully understand certain texts, rather than citing possible alternatives and trying to determine the weightier one on the basis of theoretical assumptions. It could be that the text may mean something that we might have never thought of when relying on theoretical studies.

The third aspect we need to consider in this discussion of the Prophet's statement is the meaning of his words as he described women as 'deficient in religion'. When the Prophet was asked about this deficiency, he mentioned a particular matter, which is the women's abstention from prayer and fasting during periods of menstrual and postnatal discharge. It is, then, a partial deficiency, limited only to certain aspects of worship. During menstruation a Muslim woman

can perform most of her worship. If she is on pilgrimage, she performs all the duties and rituals of the pilgrimage, except the *ṭawāf*, or circling the Ka'bah. She does not abandon the remembrance and glorification of God. True faith means firm belief coupled with a clear sense of God-fearingness. This is followed by the performance of worship rituals and adhering to a moral code in all dealings with other people. Moreover, the deficiency mentioned by the Prophet is a temporary one, lasting only a short time. Besides, menstruation ceases during the nine months of pregnancy, and stops altogether at a certain age. From another point of view, this sort of deficiency is not the result of anything a woman does by choice. A female believer often feels sad that she is unable to pray or fast during her period, but she knows that she must accept this willingly and with patience. She is rewarded by God for such acceptance.

Having said that, a Muslim woman may compensate for missing prayer by offering two types of worship. The first is a prompt one, voluntarily offering other types of worship, such as reading the Qur'an, sincere supplication, glorifying God seeking His forgiveness and praising Him. The other type of compensation is to offer voluntary prayers when she is clean from menses.

To recap, the deficiency in mind means either a deficiency in mental power due to the way women's mind is created, or a deficiency in the mind's output due to certain biological, social or psychological factors. This is the case with women generally. The hadith we are discussing explains the deficiency in terms of the mind's output, citing the Qur'anic verse concerning women's testimony: "Call in two of your men to act as witnesses, but if two men are not available, then a man and two women, whom you consider acceptable as witnesses, so that if either of them should make a mistake, the other will remind her". (2: 282) The hadith does not mention anything about any natural deficiency in women's mental ability. Whether there is such a deficiency is a matter for serious scientific research.

The deficiency in religion means either a lack of commitment to the faith, i.e. a deficiency in believing in God and obeying Him, or a deficiency in the worship duties God requires of man. This second type means that a person performs less worship duties, not out of omission or negligence but because God requires so. The hadith we are looking at cites an obligation imposed by God on women to abstain from prayer and fasting on certain days. Yet this type of restriction in her worship duties may lead a woman to become less God-fearing. If this happens, it would be a personal case, not a general one that applies to all women.

We must be careful not to go beyond the Prophet's explanation of the deficiency he mentioned. Should we go beyond this explanation, we will be looking at arbitrary explanations and possibilities, or we may indeed be carried away by our imagination. This takes us into the area God warns us against, which is the pursuit of allegorical statements, be they in the Qur'an or in the Hadith: 'He it is Who has sent down to you the Book, containing verses which are clear and precise—and these are the essence of the Book—and others are equivocal. Those whose hearts have swerved from the truth pursue that part of it which is allegorical, seeking to create dissension and trying to give it an arbitrary meaning. None save God knows its final meaning'. (3: 7) Commenting on this verse, al-Shawkānī says: "It shows that those who swerve from the truth try to pursue equivocal Qur'anic statements. What is meant by 'equivocal' in this respect is a statement that does not readily impart a clear meaning, whether it uses equivocation or needs an external indicator to point to its meaning, even though its wording appears to be clear in the first instance.

There are several often quoted hadiths that suggest that women are weak both in intellect and in faith. These, however, are either fabricated or very poor in authenticity. These are no more than the result of fertile imagination and myth going back to old days of

ignorance. Muslims should have ridden themselves of such traces long ago. Unfortunately, such myth remains with us because we go beyond the Prophet's explanation of the deficiency in women's minds and religion. Hence, some false notions about women continue to linger with us. Hadiths that say: 'Do not teach women to write and do not let them dwell in rooms', are fabricated. As are, 'To obey a woman leads to inevitable regret'. 'Had it not been for women, God would have been truly worshipped.' 'Consult women, but always act against their advice.' All these statements are sheer fabrication. None can be classified as a hadith with any degree of authenticity. There are other statements that are extremely poor in authenticity, such as: 'Men ruin themselves when they obey women'. 'Your worst enemy is your wife.' Similarly lacking in authenticity is the statement attributed to 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb: 'Act contrary to women's counsel, for to do so will bring you a blessing'.

The third hadith:

Abu Hurayrah quotes the Prophet as saying: 'Take good care of women, for women are created from a rib, and the most crooked part of a rib is its top. Should you try to straighten it, you will break it, but if you leave it alone it will remain crooked. Therefore, take good care of women'. (Related by al-Bukhari and Muslim) Abu Hurayrah also reports that the Prophet said: 'A woman is created from a rib. She will never remain consistent. If you wish to enjoy her company, you will have to accept her crookedness. Should you try to straighten that, you will break her. The break means her divorce'. (Related by Muslim)

This hadith makes several points. The first is a general order to take good care of women. Some scholars say that this means that Muslims should urge one another to be good to their women.

Secondly, this order is made on the basis of something related to the way women are created: 'Women are created from a rib, and the

most crooked part of a rib is its top'. This means that she is created differently from man, and her nature involves some contrasting factor. The Prophet did not specify the area or the extent of such curvature, but he pointed to the effect of her awry nature on her behaviour. Based on what we see in practical life, should we then take the term "crooked" in the hadith to mean quick reactions and strong feelings, or perhaps strong sensitivity and impulsiveness? Crookedness is the opposite of being straight. If balanced and controlled feelings equate with being straight, then excitability and too strong feelings equate with crookedness. Likewise, if controlled emotions reflect a straight condition, then uncontrollable emotions reflect crookedness. Women are often more likely to let their emotions take the better of them, making decisions without wise consideration, or saying or doing something that they later regret. Moreover, their impulsiveness may lead to quick changes of mood. The Prophet's description is absolutely accurate: 'A woman is created from a rib. She will never remain consistent'. Such inconsistency may often be irritating or even infuriating to a man. This understanding is confirmed by what the Prophet said in his admonition to women: 'You often use abusive words and you are often ungrateful to your men folk'. Such behaviour is usually prompted by anger, resulting from strong and quick impulses.

Thirdly, the hadith directs men to be patient with their wives, overlooking behaviour that results from such crookedness. We see this in the Prophet's words: "Should you try to straighten that [crooked-ness], you will break her. The break means her divorce". Every man should remember that his wife does not deliberately choose to act in such a way as to irritate or embarrass him. It is an outcome of the nature God has placed in her, making her emotional and impulsive. Therefore, he should be tolerant and patient, realizing that positive effects may result from such characteristics, enabling his wife to fulfil her basic duties of child bearing, breast-feeding and raising children. In all this, a woman needs strong

emotions and sensitivity. He should also realise that if he were to take issue with his wife over every little mistake that results from her impulsive nature, this would cause a wider rift between them, leading ultimately to divorce. Furthermore, a man must remember that his wife has other good and positive traits that outweigh this shortcoming. The Prophet wisely points out the way to deal with women: 'Let no man believer strongly hate a woman believer. If he hates a certain characteristic of hers, he is bound to find another that is gratifying'. (Related by Muslim)

Finally, to emphasise the need to treat women well, the Prophet concludes the hadith with the same instruction he uses at its beginning: 'Take good care of women'. In the original Arabic text, the Prophet uses a certain formula that indicates a requirement, so as to instruct men to require themselves, and others, to be kind to women. Some scholars also say that the phraseology means: 'Take my advice and act on it by being kind to women'. Ibn Ḥajar comments that this last point accurately expresses the meaning of the hadith.

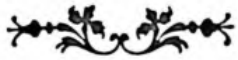
Just as we said while commenting on the previous hadith, this one also should encourage us to undertake research to determine the crookedness in women's nature and its extent.

CHAPTER VII

Comments on the Status of Muslim Women

CHAPTER SUMMARY:

- Independent status for Muslim women
- The important need of maintaining a distinguished status of women
- Factors that help in the growth of the woman's personality
- Manners to be observed in male and female relations
- The Muslim woman and the attainment of perfection



Comments on the Status of Muslim Women

Islam has given women their full rights of human integrity, independence and free will. It has also confirmed a woman's rights of ownership and freedom to conduct her own business. We have seen many examples from the Prophet's lifetime showing the extent of independence Muslim women enjoyed. We also have some clear texts confirming women's right to act independently from their husbands or guardians, although some texts suggest that it is advisable to act after consultation with either one. What we need to establish here is that Muslim women were up to all this, playing their independent role and exercising their right of choice. They spoke out in defence of their rights, sent gifts to their friends, gave charity out of their own money, worked on their farms and did many other tasks without hiding behind guardians and husbands. We need to refresh our minds with some of these examples:

Maymūnah, the last of the Prophet's wives, set her maid free without first telling the Prophet. Kurayb reports that Maymūnah bint al-Ḥārith told him that she set her maid free without first taking the

Prophet's permission. When the Prophet went to her on her night, she asked him: 'Have you, Messenger of God, realised that I have set my maid free?' He asked: 'Have you really done that?' She answered: 'Yes'. He said: 'Had you given her as a gift to your maternal uncles, you would have earned a greater reward'. (Related by al-Bukhari)

Umm Sulaym bint Milḥān sent a gift to the Prophet on his wedding day, stating that it was from her, not from her husband. "Umm Sulaym said [to her son]: 'Anas! Take this to God's Messenger and say to him: my mother sends you her greetings and says that this is a small gift from us to you...". (Related by Muslim)

Asmā' bint 'Umays argued with 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb and then complained to the Prophet. She then reported to those who travelled with her from their place of migration in Abyssinia the whole conversation. Her husband was not present on any of these occasions, or he might have been present during the last one. 'Umar said to Asmā': "We have been ahead of you in migrating here, and thus we have a better claim to God's Messenger than you.' This angered her, and she retorted: 'By God, it is not true. You were with God's Messenger, under his care. He fed the hungry among you and admonished whoever needed admonition. We were in the land of hateful people in faraway Abyssinia, enduring our stay for the sake of God and His Messenger. By God, I will not eat or drink anything until I have reported what you have said to God's Messenger' ... The Prophet said to her: 'He has no greater claim to me than you have. He and his companions have migrated once, but you, the people of the boat, have migrated twice'. She said: 'Abu Mūsā and the other people who travelled by boat came to me, one group after another, asking me about this hadith'. (Related by al-Bukhari and Muslim)

Islam makes clear that guardians and husbands have a right to be consulted, and that a woman should obey her guardian or husband in what is good and reasonable, so that social and family relations are maintained and strengthened. However, such obedience in what

is reasonable does not mean that women are not competent, or that they must always remain under close supervision. Consultation is required of the Muslim community generally, men and women alike. God says of the Muslim community: '[They] conduct their affairs by mutual consultation'. (42: 38) Indeed every Muslim ruler is required to consult the community in all serious matters: "Consult with them in the conduct of public affairs'. (3: 159) Likewise, obedience is required of all people in the community, men and women: they should obey every responsible person in his or her jurisdiction. The community as a whole is required to obey the ruler: 'Believers, obey God and obey the Messenger and those from among you who have been entrusted with authority'. (4: 59) Since obedience is required only in what is good and reasonable, then matters are clear and the family will be in a good position, going through life in an easy and beneficial way. Society will benefit in all aspects, and the Muslim community as a whole will prosper and achieve success.

It is when guardians and husbands impose what is neither good nor reasonable that things go awry and danger looms. Therefore, they must all be redirected to what is good and reasonable, following the orders of God and His Messenger. Here are some examples of directing guardians to opt for the more reasonable and better course:

1. Al-Ḥasan reports: "Ma'qil ibn Yasār's sister was divorced by her husband who left her until her waiting period had run out. He then came back proposing remarriage. Ma'qil felt angry at this. He said: 'He left her when he could have reinstated the marriage, but he now comes back again for her!'[44] Ma'qil,

44. According to Islamic law, a divorced woman observes a waiting period of around three months, or until she delivers if she is pregnant, during which she stays with her divorcing husband but uses a separate bedroom. The divorcing husband can reinstate the marriage without a fresh contract during the waiting period. If he lets the waiting period lapse, remarriage requires a fresh contract and the payment of a fresh dowry to the wife.

therefore, rejected the new proposal. [According to another version of this hadith, the man was a reasonably good one and Ma'qil's sister was willing to remarry him.] A Qur'anic verse was revealed dealing with such cases: "When you have divorced women and they have reached the end of their waiting-term, do not prevent them from marrying their husbands if they have agreed with each other in a fair manner. This is an admonition for every one of you who believes in God and the Last Day. That is more virtuous for you, and purer. God knows, whereas you do not know". (2: 232) God's Messenger called in Ma'qil and recited the verse to him, whereupon he abandoned personal pride and submitted to God's order". (Related by al-Bukhari)

2. Jābir ibn 'Abdullāh narrated: 'My maternal aunt was divorced. She wanted to pick the fruit of her date trees [during her waiting period], but a man roughly told her that she was not allowed to leave home. She went to the Prophet and asked him. He said: 'Yes, you may pick your fruit. You may give some to charity or do some kindly deed". (Related by Muslim)

3. 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb reports: '...Once I was deliberating within myself about a particular matter when my wife said, 'It may be appropriate if you do so and so'. I said, 'And why do you interfere in something of my concerns?' She said, 'This is amazing coming from you, Ibn al-Khaṭṭāb! You object to listen to an argument, when your daughter[45] argues with God's Messenger [peace be upon him]! [Another version of this hadith mentions that 'Umar's wife said to him: 'Why would you object to me questioning you on something, when the Prophet's wives do so with him?'] (Related by al-Bukhari and Muslim) Thus 'Umar was redirected to the better course by citing before him the Prophet's own conduct with his wives.

45. His daughter was Ḥafṣah, the Prophet's wife.

4. Sālim quotes his father, 'Abdullāh ibn 'Umar, as saying: 'I heard God's Messenger say: 'Do not stop your women from attending mosques when they ask permission to go there'. Bilāl ibn 'Abdullāh said: 'By God, we will stop them'. [In another version, Bilāl says to his father: 'We will not let them go out so that they would not use that as a pretext for something untoward'.] His father went up to him, hurling on him such strong verbal abuse as I never heard him use before. He then said to him: 'I tell you something the Prophet said and you say that you will do the opposite!" (Related by Muslim) This situation shows someone belonging to the *tābi'īn* generation trying to stop women from going to the mosque, and where a companion of the Prophet sets the record straight and confirms that women must be free to go if they wish.

Maintaining a Distinguished Status of Women

God has given males and females special distinctive characteristics. Each sex must keep up this distinction. Both men and women must maintain their own characteristics. It is exceedingly wrong for anyone to try to imitate the characteristics of the other sex. Such affectation is denounced by Islam. Since we are talking about women's status, we need to stress the importance of women maintaining their status and distinction. Thus they will show that they are proud of their humanity and the natural characteristics with which God has honoured them. To try to put on some of man's distinctive characteristics distorts God's creation on the one hand and betrays a feeling of inferiority on the other. Indeed, maintaining their own status enables women to fulfil their most important responsibility, namely looking after their families and bringing up their children. Here are some hadith texts that speak of the importance of keeping up the distinction:

1. Ibn 'Abbās reports: 'God's Messenger has cursed men who put up a feminine appearance and women who put up a male appearance'. (Related by al-Bukhari)
2. Ibn 'Abbās reports: 'The Prophet has cursed effeminate men and masculine women'. (Related by al-Bukhari)
3. A man from the Hudhayl tribe reports that he visited 'Abdullāh ibn 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ, stating that his home was outside the Ḥaram area, but his mosque was inside it: "As I was with him, he saw Umm Sa'īd bint Abu Jahl, carrying a bow on her shoulder and walking in a manly way. 'Abdullāh asked who the woman was. I told him. He said: I heard God's Messenger when he said: 'A man who puts up a feminine appearance and a woman who puts up a masculine appearance do not belong to our community". (Related by Ahmad and al-Ṭabarānī)
4. Abu Hurayrah reports: 'The Prophet has cursed the man who wears women's clothes and the woman who wears men's clothes'. (Related by Abu Dāwūd)

The natural characteristics of both men and women are enhanced and perfected through the exercise and fulfilment of their natural responsibilities in human life. When either one undertakes the responsibilities of the other, or a large portion of these, such people will acquire some of the characteristics of the opposite sex, while some of their own may diminish. No such person, man or woman, will be able to lead a proper life. If such a person is a woman, she will not become a man and will not remain a woman. She becomes a freak, suffering a psychological conflict between her nature and the characteristics she affects. Moreover, the whole of society will suffer from the unfulfillment of women's gentle and sweet responsibility of ensuring a serene family life at home and her other tough responsibility of giving birth to her children and their upbringing.

Deviation from divine guidance and the way mapped by His Messenger occurs when women adopt masculine characteristics. Likewise, it occurs when the distinction between the two sexes is overemphasized to the extent that their equality is forgotten. In such cases, the Prophet's statement that 'women are men's equal sisters' is totally overlooked. Women are then denied almost every human characteristic they share with men and become a second or a third class species. They no longer enjoy any honourable status, and they are denied their independent status, free choice, participation in social activities, and the fulfilment of their political role. They are looked upon as if they are disabled or dysfunctional creatures. Yet Islam has established their full human status, defining their characteristics and their fundamental rights which we have outlined in the previous chapters.

Factors Promoting Women's Independent Status

1. Correcting Muslims' Concepts

Muslims have long held some wrong concepts about women and their status. These must be corrected by reference to the Qur'an and the Prophet's tradition or sunnah. What is most important in this process is to correct women's own concept of themselves. Once this is done, women will be free to participate fully in the building of human life. The woman's new concept will ensure that she steers a responsible course in life which will help in correcting the concepts of those around her. The proper Islamic concept of woman and her role shows her to be:

- Honourable. God says in the Qur'an: 'We have indeed honoured the children of Adam'. (17: 70) Adam's children are of both sexes, male and female. It is true that the Prophet says that women are 'deficient in mind and religion', and that 'the woman has been created from a rib, and that the most crooked

part of a rib is its top'. However, people have misunderstood these statements as we have already explained. In fact these statements are general and cannot be construed to detract from women's honourable position stated in definitive statements.

- Responsible. She is accountable in the same way as man for all actions she may do in life, whether civil or criminal. She will receive her recompense for her actions on the Day of Judgement, just like a man. No father, brother or husband will relieve a woman of responsibility for her actions. God says: 'Whoever does righteous deeds, whether man or woman, and is a believer, We shall most certainly give a good life. And We shall indeed reward these according to the best that they ever did'. (16: 97) He also says: 'As for the adulteress and the adulterer, flog each of them with a hundred stripes'. (24: 2) 'As for the man or the woman who is guilty of stealing, cut off their hands in requital for what they have wrought, as an exemplary punishment ordained by God. God is Almighty, Wise.' (5: 38) The Prophet said to his close relatives: 'You, 'Abbās ibn 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib, I cannot avail you anything in front of God. You, Ṣafiyyah, the Prophet's aunt, I cannot avail you anything in front of God. And you, Fāṭimah bint Muhammad, I cannot avail you anything'. (Related by al-Bukhari and Muslim)
- Independent. She enjoys freedom of choice. She chooses her husband, free from all pressure. The Prophet says: 'No previously married woman may be given away in marriage unless she is consulted; and no virgin woman may be married without her consent'. (Related by al-Bukhari and Muslim) Moreover, she has the right to terminate her marriage, either with her husband's agreement or by a judge's decision. However, she should refund him the dowry he gave her, if he has not harmed her. "Thābit ibn Qays's wife said to the Prophet: 'Messenger of God! I do not take anything against

Thābit in his faith or manners, but I fear that I will be ungrateful'. The Prophet asked her whether she was prepared to return the garden her husband had given her as dowry. She said she was. In fact, she returned it and the Prophet ordered Thābit to leave her'. (Related by al-Bukhari)

- A person of full integrity. She is man's family partner, not his sex object. God describes men and women in the same terms: "It is lawful for you to be intimate with your wives during the night preceding the fast. They are as a garment for you, as you are for them'. (2: 187) Family responsibilities are shared between man and wife. It is God who has given man the necessary qualities to earn the family living and take care of his women folk. He says: 'Men shall take full care of women with the bounties with which God has favoured some of them more abundantly than others, and with what they may spend of their own wealth'. (4: 34) Likewise, He has given women the necessary qualities to look after young children and manage their homes. The Prophet says: 'A woman is a shepherd in her husband's home, taking care of his children and is responsible for them'. (Related by al-Bukhari and Muslim) This means that she is not a mere extension of the man, without a mind and will of her own. On the contrary, relations between man and wife are based on mutual affection and compassion. When these are lacking, the marriage is terminated in a lawful way.
- Mature, able to participate in good social and political activity. God says in the Qur'an: 'The believers, men and women, are friends to one another: They enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong'. (9: 71) She is in no way a source of shame which should be hidden from people's eyes. There are those who try to hide the woman away: her person, face, voice and even her name. If certain parts of a woman's body should be covered, man also has parts of his body which must be covered.

- Having a full personality. She is unlike the way some people describe her: either naïve and culpable, or wicked and scheming. If some women betray any of these traits, some men also do.

2. The Fulfilment of Duties

The fulfilment of duties means participating in activities of a different nature: mental, physical and emotional. Needless to say, every duty is fulfilled in the way that is suited to its nature. When women attend to their duties, their action helps in the development of their characters. They will be seen to have their own personalities and their worthy concerns. It gives them experience in life. Hence, a woman who neglects a duty incurs a loss. She loses a chance to develop her personality and improve herself. The fulfilment of her duties towards God, such as attending to her obligatory worship, and her duties towards her family and community, gives a woman goodly reward. The better she is in fulfilling such duties, the better and more mature her personality is.

3. The Exercise of Rights

The exercise of rights also entails undertaking multi-faceted activity on all mental, physical and emotional levels. It should be noted that the exercise of rights and the fulfilment of duties are mutually complementary and ensure a better outcome. When a woman exercises her rights, she increases her improvement and benefits more by her experience. Among the rights that a woman is certain to benefit by exercising are: attending religious circles, pursuing studies in different areas, marriage and raising a family, taking up work or a profession if she has the time to do so, and participation in any type of good social or political activity. Some or all of these rights may become duties if their exercise is certain to fulfil a necessity or a need for the woman herself, or for her family or her community.

Manners to be Observed in Male and Female Relations

In their dealings with women, Muslims are required to observe certain values outlined by their faith. Such values must be well entrenched in their hearts and their consciences, because they stem from the proper understanding of the position of honour Islam accords to women. Moreover, Islam implants in the hearts of its followers the paramount value of gentle and kind treatment of women. People in Western countries treat women courteously, and this is based, in their culture, on a number of considerations, some of which are commendable and some superficial. Our courteous treatment of women is, by contrast, superior, based on genuinely commendable values that Islam puts in our hearts. These are enhanced by the guidance the Prophet gives us in his treatment of his wives, daughters, other Muslim women and also non-Muslim women. Here are some aspects of such guidance:

1. With His Wives:

- 'Ā'ishah was asked what the Prophet was like when he was at home. She answered: 'He attended to his wives' needs'. (Related by al-Bukhari)
- 'Ā'ishah narrated: '... When the Prophet embarked on a journey,[46] he drew lots between his wives. He would take with him the one who won the lot'. (Related by al-Bukhari and Muslim)
- The Prophet used to spend the last ten days of Ramadan in the mosque, devoting himself to worship, leaving the mosque only for the most essential of needs. This voluntary aspect of

46. Most journeys the Prophet took were military expeditions, even though most ended without fighting. The Prophet was quick to respond to any threat, travelling fast to face the enemy before they have completed their preparations. This often led to reaching an agreement without bloodshed. Hence, in many hadiths these expeditions are referred to as journeys.

worship is known in Islam as *i'tikāf*. He might be visited by one or more of his wives. Ṣafiyyah, his wife, reports that she: 'Went to visit the Prophet during his *i'tikāf*. She stayed with him for about an hour before she rose to leave. The Prophet left with her and accompanied her until she reached her home". Another version of this occasion states: 'The Prophet was in the mosque and his wives were with him. They were about to leave, but he said to Ṣafiyyah: 'Do not leave yet, so that I will take you home".[47] (Related by al-Bukhari and Muslim)

- Anas reports that the Prophet had a Persian neighbour who was known to be a good cook. 'He cooked something for the Prophet and came over to invite him to come to his place. The Prophet pointed to 'Ā'ishah and said to the man: 'What about this one?' The man said: 'No'. So the Prophet said: 'No'. The man went away and came back repeating the invitation. Again the Prophet asked him: 'What about this one?' The man said: 'No'. The Prophet again said: 'No'. A little later the man came again and repeated the invitation. The Prophet again asked him: 'And this one?' The man said: 'Yes'. Both of them rose and went quickly with the man to his home'. (Related by Muslim)
- Anas reports that when the Battle of Khaybar was over and arrangements were finalized with its people: "We set out to return to Madinah. I saw the Prophet using a cloak to make a cushion for Ṣafiyyah[48] to sit on as she rode behind him on

47. Most of the Prophet's wives had their homes adjacent to the mosque. However, Safiyyah's home was at a distance from the mosque. Hence, the Prophet accompanied her on her way back.

48. Ṣafiyyah's father, Huyay ibn Akhtab, was a Jewish rabbi and one of the worst enemies of Islam. He tried hard to raise armies and make alliances in an effort to crush Islam and annihilate the Muslims. The Prophet married Ṣafiyyah shortly after the Battle of Khaybar, in which her husband was killed, indicating that Islam does not hold children responsible for their parents' actions and does not perpetuate hostility. Treating his new wife in this way, in front of everybody, indicated how Islam treats women.

his camel. He sat next to his camel and he bent his knee for Ṣafiyyah to step on and ride'. (Related by al-Bukhari)

- 'Ā'ishah narrated: '... It was a day when the people of Abyssinia played with leather shields and spears. Either I asked the Prophet or he said to me: 'Would you like to watch?' I answered: 'Yes'. He placed me behind him, and I put my cheek on his cheek.[49] He said to them: 'Come on and play'. When I had watched for some time, he asked me: 'Have you had enough?' I said: 'Yes'. He told me that I could go'. (Related by al-Bukhari and Muslim)

2. With His Daughter:

'Ā'ishah narrated: 'Fāṭimah came over walking in the same way as the Prophet walks. The Prophet said to her: 'Welcome to my daughter'. He then asked her to sit down, either to his right or to his left'. (Related by al-Bukhari and Muslim) Another version related by Abu Dāwūd, al-Tirmidhī and al-Nasā'ī adds: 'Whenever she came to visit the Prophet, he would rise to greet her, kiss her and seat her wherever he was sitting'.

3. With Muslim women:

- Anas ibn Mālik quotes the Prophet as saying: "I would start a prayer intending to make it long. I would then hear a child crying and I would make my prayer short because I know how distressed its mother would be hearing it cry". (Related by al-Bukhari and Muslim)
- Umm Salamah narrated: 'When the Prophet finished a congregational prayer, the women would rise to leave. He would stay a little longer before he rose'. Al-Zuhrī comments: 'I think—but God knows best—that he stayed on to allow the

49. The Prophet sat down and 'Ā'ishah stood behind him with her head on his shoulder, and her cheek on his.

women to be on their way home before men who left early caught up with them'. (Related by al-Bukhari)

- On Eid occasions, the Prophet wanted all women, including the ones who could not pray, given they were menstruating, to come to the prayer place in the open air. Umm 'Aṭiyyah reports that she heard the Prophet saying: 'Let all young women [who have attained puberty] and unmarried young women... including the ones who are having their period come over. They will share in the goodness of the occasion and join in the believers' supplication. The ones menstruating stay apart from the prayer place'. (Related by al-Bukhari and Muslim)
- Jābir ibn 'Abdullāh reports on how the Prophet went specially to address the women on one Eid occasion, as he thought they did not hear his sermon: 'On the day of Eid al-Fiṭr, the Prophet stood up and prayed. He then led the congregation in the Eid Prayer. He then delivered his sermon. When he finished, he came down. (Another version adds: 'He thought his sermon was not heard well enough by the women). He went up to the women and admonished them.' (Related by al-Bukhari and Muslim)
- Anas ibn Mālik reports: 'The Prophet saw a group of women and children coming back from a wedding. He stood up fully to greet them. He said to them: 'God knows that you are among the people I love most'. He repeated this three times'. (Related by al-Bukhari and Muslim)
- Anas reports that as: 'The Prophet was on his way back from a journey, accompanied by some of his women and Umm Sulaym, a young lad called Anjushah was singing to drive the camels. (In the version related by Ahmad we have the additional information that the lad's singing made the camels move faster) The Prophet said to him: 'Easy, easy, Anjushah! We have ladies with us". (Related by al-Bukhari and Muslim)

- The last hadith speaks of the Prophet realizing that speed may tire the ladies and him giving instructions to the camel driver to slow down so that they may travel in comfort. Here is another hadith showing how the Prophet attends to one woman, trying to ease her burden, but then realising that she was more comfortable being left alone. Asmā' bint Abu Bakr, the Prophet's sister-in-law, reports: '... I used to carry the date stones from al-Zubayr's [her husband] land... which was two miles away from where I lived. I was coming back one day, carrying the date stones on my head. I met the Prophet on his camel with a group of the Anṣār. He called me, and started to make his camel sit. He wanted me to ride behind him. I felt too shy to be with all those men... The Prophet realised this, so he left me and went on". (Related by al-Bukhari and Muslim)
- 'Abdullāh ibn 'Umar says of 'Uthmān: '... As for his absence from the Battle of Badr, his wife, the Prophet's daughter, was ill. The Prophet told him: 'You will have the reward of one who has taken part in the Battle of Badr and a man's share in the spoils of war'.'[50] (Related by al-Bukhari)
- 'Abdullāh ibn 'Abbās narrated: '... A man said to the Prophet: 'Messenger of God! I want to join the army going on this expedition. (In the version related by Muslim the man says: I have enrolled in the army going on such and such expedition) My wife, however, wants to offer the pilgrimage'. The Prophet told him to go with his wife'. (Related by al-Bukhari and Muslim)
- Abu Hurayrah reports that a black man or a black woman used to clean the mosque. (In one version of this hadith Abu Hurayrah is quoted as saying: 'Most probably that person

50. What is reported in other hadiths is that the Prophet instructed 'Uthmān to stay behind so that he could nurse his wife, Ruqayyah, as her illness was quite severe. In fact, when the heralds returned to Madinah to inform the people of the Prophet's victory in the Battle of Badr, they found out that Ruqayyah had just died.

was a woman') That person died. Sometime later the Prophet enquired about her and was informed of her death. He said: 'Why have you not informed me of her death? Show me her grave'. He went to her grave and offered the prayer for the deceased, [i.e. *Janāzah* Prayer]". (Related by al-Bukhari and Muslim)

We conclude these examples of the Prophet's guidance on treating Muslim women with the following example that is related in one of the six anthologies of authentic hadiths, although not reported by the two main ones of al-Bukhari and Muslim. This example is added because it is particularly interesting, as it shows the Prophet going out of his way to gratify a maid who pledged to play the tambourine for him. Buraydah reports: "The Prophet went on one of his expeditions. When he came back, a black maid came over to him and said: 'Messenger of God! I had pledged to God that if God returned you here safely, I would play the tambourine in front of you and sing'. The Prophet said to her: 'If you pledged that, then go on and play; but if you did not make such a pledge, then do not'. She went on and played the tambourine...'. (Related by al-Tirmidhī)

4. With Non-Muslim Women:

- Some non-Muslims used to ridicule the Prophet or Islamic worship, but the Prophet would not respond to them. Jundab ibn Sufyān reports one such occasion from the early days of Islam in Makkah, when a woman ridiculed the Prophet's worship: 'The Prophet was taken ill, so he did not perform his night worship on two or three nights. A woman came to him and said: 'Muhammad! I hope that your jinnee has deserted you. I have not seen him coming near you for two or three nights'. Soon afterwards *Surah al-Ḍuḥa* was revealed, starting with: "By the bright morning hours, and the night when it grows still and dark, your Lord has neither forsaken

you, nor does He hate you'. (93: 1-3) (Related by al-Bukhari and Muslim)

- On one occasion, the Prophet saw two non-Muslim women who were apparently scared, and he stopped to enquire what was the matter with them and offer help. Abu Dharr reports: '... Then, on a bright night with a full moon, I noticed that the people of Makkah were asleep and none of them was doing the *ṭawāf* around the Ka'bah. Two women were praying to the two idols Isāf and Nā'ilah. Then they ran wailing and shouting: 'Had there been anyone of our men'. Soon the Prophet met them as he was coming down with Abu Bakr. He asked what was the matter with them. They said: 'It is that convert, standing behind the coverings of the Ka'bah'. He asked them what he said to them. They replied: 'He said a mouthful". (Related by Muslim)
- When the Prophet and his companions were extremely short of food or water, he might request a favour from a non-Muslim, but he would handsomely reward that person. The following is an illustrative example. 'Imrān reports: "We were on a journey with the Prophet when people complained to him that they were very thirsty. He called one man... and he also called 'Alī and said to both men: 'Go and try to find some water'. They went on that errand, and they found a woman riding a camel, sitting between two large waterskins. They asked her where they could find the water. She said: 'The last water I saw was this time yesterday. Our men have gone searching for more'. They told her to come with them. She asked where to and they said: 'To God's Messenger'. She asked: 'Is he the one who is described as Ṣābi' [i.e. the one who changed his religion]? They said: 'He is the one you mean. So come with us'. They took her to the Prophet... The Prophet called for a container and he poured some water in it from the spouts of the two waterskins... A call went out to all the

people to come and drink, and to fill their water containers... She stood there looking at what was being done with her water. By God, the Prophet left off her waterskins and we all thought that they were fuller than when he started to pour water out of them. The Prophet then said to his companions to collect some food for her. They brought things they had, such as dates, bread and baked foods. They wrapped all this in a piece of cloth and put the woman on her camel, placing the food in front of her. The Prophet said to her: 'You know that we have not taken anything of your water. It is God who has given us water to drink'". (Muslim's version adds that the woman told the Prophet that she was a widow and that she had young orphan children. He told her to give the food to her family) (Related by al-Bukhari and Muslim)

- Anas ibn Mālik reports that a Jewish woman brought a poisoned cooked lamb to the Prophet, and he ate a bite of it: "When the woman was brought back to him, some people asked him: 'Shall we kill her?' He said: 'No". The version related by Muslim adds: "The woman was brought to the Prophet and he questioned her. She said: 'I wanted to kill you'. He said: 'God would not have let you'. (Related by al-Bukhari and Muslim)
- 'Abdullāh ibn 'Umar reports: 'On one of the Prophet's military expeditions, a woman was found killed. The Prophet issued a clear order not to kill any woman or child'. (Related by al-Bukhari and Muslim)
- Abu Hurayrah reports: 'I used to call on my mother to believe in Islam, but she remained an unbeliever, associating partners with God. One day I appealed to her to accept Islam, but she said something about the Prophet which offended me. I went to the Prophet with tears in my eyes. I said: 'Messenger of God! I have been calling on my mother to accept Islam but she rebuffed me. Today, she went further and said something

about you that hurt me. Please pray to God to guide Abu Hurayrah's mother'. The Prophet said: 'My Lord, guide Abu Hurayrah's mother to the truth'. I left him, delighted with his prayer for her. As I approached my home... my mother opened the door and said to me: 'Abu Hurayrah! I bear witness that there is no deity other than God, and I bear witness that Muhammad is God's Messenger...". (Related by Muslim)

Women and the Attainment of Perfection

Abu Mūsā al-Ash'arī quotes the Prophet as saying: 'Many men had attained to perfection, but the only women to attain perfection were Āsiyah, Pharaoh's wife, and Maryam[51] bint 'Imrān.' (Related by al-Bukhari and Muslim)

Commenting on this hadith, Ibn Ḥajar says:

> The Prophet's statement, 'the only women to attain perfection were Āsiyah, Pharaoh's wife, and Maryam bint 'Imrān', indicates that they were prophets. The highest point of human perfection is that attained by prophets, followed by the righteous, the ones who never deviate from the truth and the martyrs. Were we to say that they were not prophets, this would mean that no woman could be righteous, truth advocate or martyr, but in real life, many women are so. Hence, the Prophet's statement means that the only women to be prophets were those two. The only other explanation is that the Prophet might have meant a perfection other than that of prophets, but there is

51. This is how Mary, Jesus's mother, is referred to in the Qur'an. We my use this version, Maryam, interchangeably with the more common form, i.e. Mary.

no evidence to support such a reading of the statement. Hence, the statement relates to people that lived before the Prophet's own time, and he does not refer here to any woman among his contemporaries....

Al-Qurṭubī says: 'The right thing is to say that Mary was a prophet since God sent revelations to her through the angel'. 'Iyāḍ says, however, that the majority of scholars disagree with this. Al-Qurṭubī further says: 'As for Āsiyah, we have nothing to confirm her prophethood'. Al-Karmānī says: 'It has been reported that scholars are unanimously in agreement that no woman was ever a prophet'. Such is what he says!!

Al-Ash'arī is reported to say: 'The women that were prophets are six: Eve, Sarah, Moses' mother, Hagar, Āsiyah and Mary'. In his view, the criterion he applies is that whoever receives through the angel a command from God, involving either a permission or a prohibition, or information about something that is yet to happen, is a prophet. It is confirmed that all these women received different things of such nature from God through the angel. Indeed, the Qur'an states that some of them received revelation.

Furthermore, Ibn Ḥazm writes in *al-Milal wal-Niḥal* that dispute on this question only occurred in his own lifetime in Cordoba, and he quotes different scholars' views. The third of these views is not to lean either way. He then says: 'Those who argue that women could not be prophets cite as evidence the Qur'anic statement: 'The messengers We sent before you were but men whom We inspired'. (16: 43) Yet this constitutes no basis for argument because no one argues that any woman was a messenger of God. The dispute concerns whether some women were prophets only'.

> Ibn Ḥazm further says: 'The clearest statements on this point are those concerning Mary. Moreover, in the Qur'anic account of Moses' mother we have confirmation of this in the fact that she went ahead and cast her newly-born child in the river as she received revelations commanding her to do so. From another point of view, after giving different accounts of Mary and several prophets, God says: 'These were some of the prophets upon whom God bestowed His blessings'. (19: 58) Thus she is included in this clearly inclusive statement'.
>
> Āsiyah, Pharaoh's wife, demonstrated a number of virtues and noble characteristics. One of these was to choose to be killed rather than to remain a queen, preferring to endure torture and suffering in this world to the enjoyment of the comfort and luxury that was at her fingertips. Furthermore, she was quick to realize what happiness the little child, Moses, would bring her, saying to Pharaoh: 'A joy to the eye he will be for me'. (28: 9)

We, thus, have an authentic hadith quoting the Prophet's statement, and we have views expressed by a number of our highly respected scholars who lived long before our time, which is claimed to be the time when women acquired their freedom. Those renowned scholars preferred to stick to the guidance shown by Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), disregarding all ignorant attitudes that prevailed in their own generations. They did not succumb before centuries-old myths that degrade women and deny them their rights. The hadith cited above and the views we have quoted clearly explain the high summit of perfection women can attain. Scholars may hold different views concerning the possibility of a woman being a prophet, but they are unanimous that a woman can be most righteous, an unswerving advocate of the truth and a martyr.

This hadith stating that Āsiyah and Maryam attained perfection makes several significant points:

1. Both man and woman have the natural qualities that are conducive to the attainment of perfection. This means that perfection is not impossible for women to attain, nor is it exclusive to men. If perfection is attainable, then certainly taking steps towards perfection is even more so.
2. Since women have the natural aptitude to attain perfection, it is possible, then, to increase their chances of such attainment through education, training and good effort, as is the case with men. Hence, women must pay special attention to the efforts they need to exert in order to set themselves on the way to perfection. It is also incumbent on society to open up for women all areas of education, training and other factors that increase their abilities and enhance their natural aptitudes.
3. The fact that women have the natural aptitude to attain perfection begs the question as to why the number of women who actually attained it is so small. There are several explanations such as their natural aptitude, though present, is rare among them. Another reason is lack of education and training, due either to the failure to provide adequate opportunities on the part of officials and governments or to the pressures of women's own circumstances, leading them to concentrate their efforts on their domestic duties such as child bearing, breast-feeding and raising the young. Such duties are by nature time consuming, leaving them little chance to pursue their learning or to offer voluntary worship. Nevertheless, it is a duty of the Muslim community to provide equal opportunities for men and women to receive education and training, and to make such opportunities suited to women in time, location and methods of instruction.

Unfortunately, most systems are based on men's circumstances, rather than those of women.

4. There is a question that presses on my mind: does the hadith we are discussing refer to cases of perfection that have become widely known? Does it mean that there are many men who are widely acknowledged to have attained perfection, while those women who achieved fame as having attained it are only two? What encourages me to posit this question is the fact that these two women are the ones cited in the Qur'an as an example of believers: 'God has also given examples of believers: Pharaoh's wife, who said: 'My Lord! Build me a mansion in heaven near You, and save me from Pharaoh and his doings, and save me from the wrongdoing folk'. And Mary, the daughter of 'Imrān, who guarded her chastity; and We breathed of Our spirit into her. She accepted the truth of her Lord's words and His revealed books. She was truly devout'. (66: 12)

5. The attainment of perfection in general areas in which both men and women participate, such as scholarship, worship, Islamic advocacy and jihad may be limited among women. Hence, only a few women and many more men are widely known to have attained it. However, there are other areas in which numerous women can and must have attained perfection. These areas are practically exclusive to women, and they generally involve activities that are done indoors, rarely noticed by other people. These comprise a wide range of activities attending to the different aspects of looking after the family, taking care of the needs of children, husbands and other family members. In these, a woman is in the same position as the unknown soldier. Among unknown soldiers there are different grades: some are average, others are higher and some excellent. Likewise, women achieve different grades in looking after their families, with many of them achieving a degree of perfection.

More civilised nations bestow greater honour on the unknown soldier than on a famous commander. An unknown soldier is acknowledged to have striven and made his sacrifice without expectation of reward or acknowledgement from anyone. Hence, he represents the nation, its dignity and sacrifice. The same applies to women: they are most often the unknown soldiers, and sometimes they are distinguished soldiers, but they rarely combine superior attainment with fame.

6. The hadith motivates women to seek perfection so as to increase the number of women who attain it. The same may be said of the hadith that describes women as 'deficient in mind and religion'. It motivates women to try to redress this deficiency by putting in some effort to be more involved in the world outside their homes, while taking good care of their homes and families at the same time. God tests people by widely different means. One aspect of the test a woman undergoes is her monthly period and postnatal discharge, during which she does not pray or fast. She could be patient and compensate for the worship that she misses during these times. Likewise, He has assigned to the woman the tasks of child-bearing, breast-feeding and raising the young, which preoccupies her to a degree that reduces her awareness of the world outside her home. She needs to redress this lack by putting in an extra effort that will increase her awareness and full participation with her community. It is part of her test that she is required to be a good companion to her husband, treating him well and acknowledging his good points. By so doing, she ensures her place in heaven. God does not charge any soul with more than it can cope with.

7. Since only a small number of women in olden communities attained perfection, is it not a duty binding on all of us, men and women, to work hard so that a larger number of women who follow Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) will

attain perfection? On the Day of Judgement, he will be the Prophet with the largest following, and he will point to us comparing us to other nations and communities. His mission is an act of divine grace bestowed on all worlds, and his message is the most perfect of divine messages.